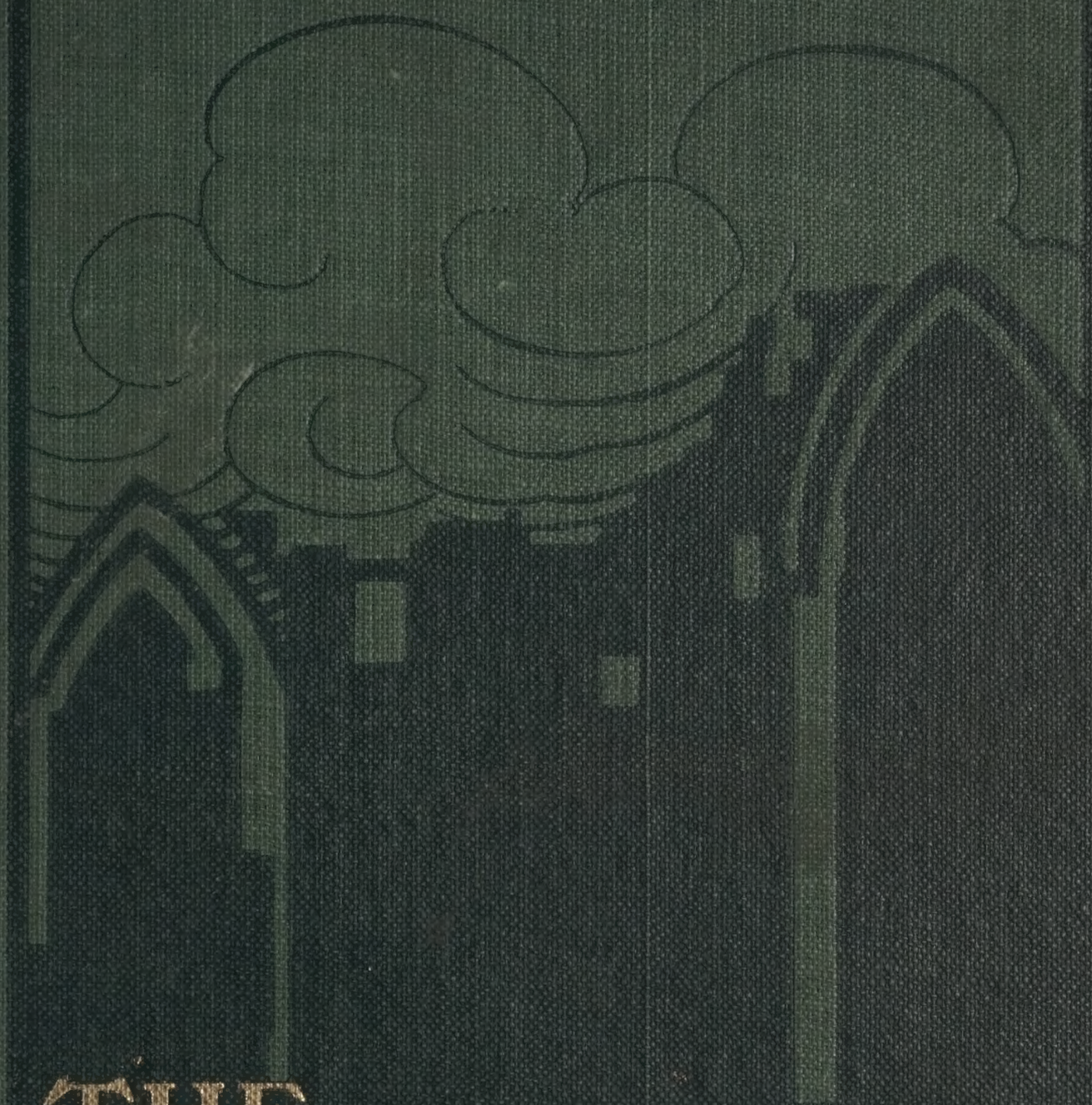


THE GREEN DEVIL
A ROMANCE of THORNTON ABBEY

BY

ARTHUR METCALF

THE GREEN DEVIL

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"I am Abelard and you are Heloise." [*Page 85*]

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IN THE DAYS OF JOHN WYCLIF

BY

ARTHUR METCALF



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To the

Father and Mother

the Brothers and Sisters

of a large and happy family

this Book is dedicated by its Author

in grateful memory of his childhood days

spent in the neighborhood where

are laid the scenes

of this romance

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THE GREEN DEVIL

CHAPTER I. A MIDNIGHT PRELUDE

THE GREEN DEVIL

CHAPTER I

A MIDNIGHT PRELUDE

IN WHICH THE STORY GETS A START, AND IT IS MADE TO APPEAR THAT SOMETIMES A MAN'S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT MAY BE IN DANGER OF NON-EXECUTION

"Hist! Here the silly fool comes."

Three closely masked men in Lincoln green slid into the shadow of a passage between two houses on the Bail, in the ancient city of Lincoln, in England, and narrowly eyed the approaching watchman.

"He's not so drunk as he will be!" whispered one, and the others laughed softly.

The cathedral bell boomed, and immediately the watchman's cry rang out over the hill, "Twelve o'clock, and midnight. All's well. God save the king." The fellow's call thinned out, and at the end he added, *sotto voce*, "And send a thirsty man a drink!"

Swinging his lantern and advancing up the narrow street, the watchman fell to humming a ballad about the greenwood and the king's deer. Shortly, by accident as it were, he met one of the men in green, who had no difficulty in piloting

him into the snuggery at the White Hart. Ensconced behind a high settee, the two discussed sundry frothy potions until, beyond a doubt, the watchman was gloriously drunk,—drunk enough to satisfy even the man in green.

The two men in green waited on the Bail until their companion and the watchman had turned into the White Hart. Then they picked their way through the dark of the back alleys until they came to a house huddled under the eaves of the cathedral.

"Here we are," whispered the taller man of the two.

For a moment he lifted the muffle from the lantern he carried in his hand. The glimmer of light which struggled through the horn fell upon a heavy oaken door, over the lintel of which the man read the word SCRIVENER. The remainder of the words which had originally been displayed on the sign, time had well-nigh obliterated. It was a stately, timbered house, evidently the abode of a well-to-do man-at-law.

The two men picked their way to the back of the dark building. All was quiet, and clouds made the summer night dark enough to conceal the men's movements. The window shutters were tightly closed and the door was locked, but the taller of the two men produced a key that seemed to have been forged for the lock of that particular door. On the worn steps the two paused and listened. Not a sound stirred. Darkness and

silence reigned. Reassured, the men entered the house and closed the door.

Inside, a passage led toward the front of the house. On either hand doors opened into rooms whose secrets they hid. The lantern threw a ghostly glimmer down the passage, and a musty odor, together with an air of mystery which haunted the house, might have daunted fainter hearts. With another key the tall man let his companion and himself stealthily into one of the rooms leading off from the passage. The room was empty of human life. Was that a step on the stair? The pair stood still and listened. No; only a loose shutter shaken by the wind. Already the thick, heavy curtains were drawn across the windows, but the tall man drew them closer and assured himself that the outside shutters were tightly closed. When he was sure that the light would not shine into the street he unmuffled his lantern, and at the lantern he lighted a candle which was standing on a table.

The light revealed a room that might have been taken for the scriptorium of a monastery. Shelves and books, parchments and heavy folios lined the walls, and tall stools stood by desks littered with parchment, quills, and ink, just as the scriveners had left them when the day's work was done, hours ago. The light also revealed the men. Only one man wore the ordinary Lincoln green. His bow and full quiver hung at his back, and a forest knife had well nigh worn through the sheath at his belt.

The faces of both men were masked. The tall man was a striking figure, and he might have just stepped out from the cast of a miracle play. Except that he was green instead of red, he was dressed exactly like the devil, horns, and tail and all,—the harlequin devil who drew upon himself the laughter of the crowd on market days, when church actors gave morality plays for the amusement and education of the people.

Only, here was no laughing matter. The Green Devil's clever, stealthy, masterful movements showed that he was bent on serious business. Moreover, he wore a very business-like French dagger at his belt, and his bow looked stout and well-used.

His companion stumbled against a chair. The Green Devil put his finger to his lips.

"You'll be hanged, drawn, and quartered if you make too much noise this trip," he added under his breath, and the precaution shod both men with velvet. The darkness outside was not more silent than they, as they went about the work in hand.

Another key mastered the door of a closet in the wall, and the two men proceeded to examine the documents which bulged the recesses behind the door. Carefully they untied each bundle, and after an examination of the parchments they re-tied the packet with scrupulous care, and put it back into its pigeon-hole. It would seem that the Green Devil was at home among legal documents, and that the immediate necessity for haste and

secrecy could not turn him from the methodical habits of a lifetime.

"It will likely be in Twidale's own hand—a good, round, full hand,"—Green Devil whispered, "endorsed on the back something like this deed to Witham Flats. Watch for 'Thornton Manor' in the title. By sonties! Here 'tis! Aye, and both testaments are here! Our lucky star shines well!"

He seized two documents from a pigeon-hole, held them unfolded to the light, and gloated over their contents. The parchments were legal instruments in black letter Latin, duly signed and acknowledged, and splotched liberally with red sealing-wax. In one of the documents the good knight, Sir Thomas Wellham, upon his death, devised the broad acres comprising the desmesne of the Thornton Manor to the Abbot and Chapter of St. Mary's Abbey or their successors at Thornton, to have and to hold forever. That parchment the Green Devil thrust into an inner pocket, with evident satisfaction. The other document was very similar in appearance. It ran in much the same terms, except that it bore a date six months later, and that, "my dear nephew William Wellman, his heirs and assigns," took the place of the Abbot and Chapter of Thornton, as the beneficiary of the last will and testament.

"Silly old fool!" exclaimed the Green Devil under his breath. "Why did he not destroy the first devisement when he made the second? Some foolish scruple about the record, I suppose! Good

men are mostly fools! Well, Sir William's loss will be the Abbey's gain. 'Tis said that the Abbey needs these lands, they lie so close. I'll slice this for the Thornton Chapter!"

With his comrade's sharp knife he slashed the document into small fragments. In the open fireplace kindling was laid ready to light. The Green Devil applied the candle, and when the flame leaped up the chimney he scattered the fragments of the parchment on the fire, and watched them shrivel until they were destroyed.

The door creaked on its hinges, and the pair turned, quickly, silently. A scrivener's apprentice stood amazed in the doorway. At the sight of the devil standing in front of the roaring fire, as though he had just dropped down the chimney, the hapless wight stood speechless, rooted to the ground with horror. Both men drew their daggers and lunged at the youth. In the action the Green Devil's mask dropped, and for a moment the youth saw a human face that it would not be easy to forget. The spell was broken. With a wild shriek the young scrivener fled. In the passage he turned to the front of the house, and scaled the staircase, three steps at a time, shouting "Fire! Robbers! The Devil!" as he fled.

The men in green glided to the door by which they had entered, and hurried out into the night. Dogs began to bark. Here and there a lattice opened, and a disheveled head pushed into the street, demanding in the name of all the saints to

know what was the matter. But the men in green halted not, nor returned answer. By the time they has reached the Bail a dozen men were in hot pursuit, the nails in their boots ringing on the cobblestones. At the Roman gate the sentry was asleep, and the fugitives slipped through unobserved by him. The pursuers came on shouting, "Shut the gate! Shut the gate on the thieves!"

The clangor awoke the sentinel in time for him to close the gate between pursued and pursuers, which feat he promptly accomplished! Just beyond the gate, in the shadow of the forest, the third man in green waited by the roadside with three horses, and the three men rode furiously northward down the Roman road.

CHAPTER II. THE BUILDERS

CHAPTER II

THE BUILDERS

IN WHICH THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO THE ABBEY OF SAINT MARY AT THORNTON, AND A CERTAIN BUILDER STUMBLES UPON A SECRET PASSAGE NOT MARKED IN THE ABBEY PLANS

Two weeks later, on a sunny afternoon, Guilbert de Rouen, Architect and Builder of the new Abbey church, moved among his workmen in the nave of the new edifice. His face wore a look of contentment, for the work went on apace. All about him the floor was cluttered with debris of brick and stone. A forest of scaffolding hid from view the outlines of the new stonework. The music of chisel and hammer mingled piquantly with the drone of workmen's voices as they plied their trades about the building, and Guilbert was mildly intoxicated with the success of his enterprise. The year was 1380, the country was merry England, the nearby hamlet was Thornton in Lincolnshire, the edifice a-building was the Abbey church of St. Mary. It was during the Abbacy of Thomas de Gretham, and the youthful second Richard of the house of Plantagenet sat on the English throne.

Dean Fletcher strolled into the building, his hands clasped behind his back, his eyes hard upon the floor, and Guilbert went to meet him.

"Will the nave be finished by the first of August, Guilbert mine?" queried the monk. "The Abbot would dedicate by the fifteenth of the month."

"I think we shall be out of your way before that. The remainder of the timber will be here straightway. You will be safe in preparing for the dedication."

" 'Tis well, Guilbert. Glad am I of the good news. We are weary of this babel. Hammer and saw mar the sound of vesper bells. We would keep the turmoil of the wicked world outside the Abbey. Tomorrow is midsummer day. You will have six weeks to the first of the month for finishing touches, which will leave us two weeks to make ready for the dedication. I pray you finish the church, though the Gate House go beyond the date."

"We are doing our best, Dean Fletcher. The Gate House and the nave will both be finished in time. Our men are working with a will. Never saw I mechanics so taken with their task, and I have seen churches a-building from Rome to Bristol ever since I was old enough to know the handle of a chisel from its edge. Fear not, Dean Fletcher, my men and I will be out of your way. You will have your church in time."

The Dean raised his head, and, ranging the building, his sharp eye took in the progress and the industry of the workmen. He, too, seemed to enjoy the music of hammers and the rhythm of cold chisels on stone, because it promised an early end to the clutter and commotion.

"By the by," he said, "'Tis rumored that Green Devil is abroad again."

"What! Again?" exclaimed Guilbert, and his face revealed the horror he felt. "Mean you, since he rifled Scrivener Twidale's house at Lincoln? Where, and what now?"

"Barrowe, this time. They say that he assayed the nunnery, and was balked—the blessed saints be praised! He fled Barton-way, rifling sundry barns and hen-roosts as he went. His pack rode at his heels, they say. The Sheriff galloped north an hour agone, but I fear me the scent is too cold."

"'Tis passing strange," Guilbert mused. "The man's stark mad, the head of crazy loons. They'll run their necks through nooses; the sooner the better. But 'tis said they stole wisely at Twidale's place. They seem to have a head. By-the-by, Dean Fletcher, rumor has it that they took but one parchment, and that was a deed to some of your Abbey lands."

The Dean was all attention. "Abbey lands, said you! I had not heard." He shook his head and read the floor. "Dame rumor surely shoots wide of the mark this time. All our deeds lie in the Abbey, snug in the muniment room, beyond the reach of devils, green or red. Yet will I look into the matter, lest the Abbey suffer. Land is a heavy stake in the game we have to play and must not lose."

The Dean meditated awhile, then continued,

"Green Devil must be of the villeins. Mayhap he is their leader, who stirs the unrest against king and church."

"Nay, nay," answered Guilbert, warmly, as though defending friends. "The villeins use not such tools. With them it has been observed that women are safe. They neither rob, steal, nor ravish. Green Devil only serves himself and the devil he mimics, is my opinion. So thinks the Abbot, for 'tis not long since he told me so."

"Well! Well! Who knows?" The Dean shrugged his shoulders. Then he abruptly changed the subject. "The Abbot deputes me to tell you, Guilbert, that the treasurer hath money to your order, that you may duly pay your men."

"Right glad am I that we have prompt money with which to pay our men," answered Guilbert; and there was that in his voice that betokened a sympathetic relationship with his men. "Your English laborers work hard, and the pay is scant at best. I know not how the poor fellows live."

At the kindly sentiment Father Fletcher broke out with a sharp show of impatience and a gesture of disapproval.

"You speak like a Wyclifite. Beshrew me, the times are thick with heresies. Men born to toil should love toil. No good comes from discontenting toilers. They are no worse off than were their fathers, and their fathers' fathers. A little wage and a cot are a good thing. You should not turn Wyclifite, good Guilbert—there's too much at

stake." The monk's tirade drifted into a patronizing tone, and was accompanied by a slight laugh in which a close observer might have suspected a touch of insincerity.

Guilbert looked annoyed, and passed up toward the transept, speaking and nodding pleasantly to his men as he went. Having nothing better to do, Father Fletcher accompanied the architect. The monk's hands were still clasped behind his back, his eyes still travelled the pavement, and every now and again his tongue shot athwart his thin lips, moistening them, as he loitered down the nave. Presently he continued, as though the matter pressed upon his mind:

"If we sympathize with mechanics and villeins we shall have them in revolt before we know it. The masses and the classes will be at each others' throats, and there'll be the devil to pay. News of riot drifts in every day. Every post threatens us from Kent. I fear me bad times are ahead. If things come to the worst, Guilbert, your sympathies and your sword would be with the Church and Nobles, would they not? A *builder* could never be an iconoclast! We must stamp out the schism between the poor and the rich."

"It's ill talking of schisms, Father Fletcher, with the shameful news that comes from Avignon," exclaimed Guilbert, warmth and humor equally mixed in his voice. "A Schismatic Church will find it difficult to protest against schism in the State. You have no fulcrum for your lever!

Really, Father Fletcher, you monks would better apply yourselves to the betterment of the villeins' lot if you fear their revolt. The well-fed are happy, and stay where they are put, but the hungry ever are a menace to society. Your charity is better than your theology, and a genial smile goes further than the crack of a whip."

The architect led the way up a winding stair in the intersection of the nave and transept, and the two men came out on a small belfry balcony cut in the angle of the wall at the level of the triforium. The scene from the belfry compelled both men to silence—the monk moved by its ecclesiastical appeal, the builder by its witching architectural symmetry.

The great nave lay at their feet, alive with workmen finishing its western bays. Eight noble arches stretched westward, their clustered pillars supporting a beautiful triforium and clerestory with pointed windows. North and south, lay the transepts, rich little chapels built into their aisles. Eastward, over the rood screen, lay the chancel, bathed in rich light strained through The Crucifixion wrought in the stained glass of the large windows above the altar. The dark oak of the carved choir stalls contrasted effectively with the marble parquetry of the pavement and harmonized with the ageing stone of the choir masonry.

Up to the two men floated the varied sounds of workmen at their trades. Yonder a group of carpenters worked upon the massive oaken doors

which were to swing in the eastern facade of the Gate House. Beyond the walls, smiths beat reluctant iron into quaint ecclesiastical shapes, and from yonder came the age-long anvil chorus. Under open sheds in the enclosure, masons shaped huge blocks of stone for the turrets of the new Gate House. Across garth and cloister, monks passed to and fro, on business or on pleasure bent.

Some unwonted hilarity among a group of novices lounging by the dial attracted Father Fletcher's attention, and, excusing himself, he hastened down the stairs, reprimand written upon his countenance and duty ostentatious in every step.

"What a strange man," Guilbert mused, as the Dean disappeared down the stairs. "If the stolen deed ever comes into his hand it will go hard with my friends at the Manor House. Truly, I like him not, and dare not trust him."

Freed from the presence of his companion, Guilbert lightly ascended the stairs to the top of the tower. At that coign of vision there met him the full glory of an English summer afternoon. Soft sunshine mottled the velvety sward below with shadows of greenwood in full leaf. The air was laden with the fragrance of wild flowers. Stately elms, royal oaks, shapely ashes, spreading beeches cast delightful shade on the forest sward. Music haunted the babble of water that ran invisibly in meadowy dells. High in mid-air trilled the marvel of the song of the lark, and in near-by bushes the matchless melody of the thrush intoxicated Guil-

bert's ear with rare music. In it all there lurked an indefinable sense of lingering day, with the sun far away to the north, time for everything plenty and to spare, inviting both to labor and to leisure.

The buildings of the Abbey lay clustered beneath Guilbert's feet—dormitories, refectory, scriptorium, the chapter house and the Abbot's residence, the old Gate House, workshops for the Abbey's craftsmen, bakery, brewery, granaries, stables, piggeries, dovecote,—and his eye compassed the architectural ensemble with delight.

But chiefly was Guilbert pleased with the new Gate House in the westward enclosing wall, gleaming in the virgin purity of newly cut stone, fresh from the hands of his men, the scaffolding still veiling its beauty from less expert eyes than his. The oriel window challenged his admiration, and he murmured to himself:

"There's not a finer in England. Bigger there are, but none better. 'Twas an inspiration. 'Twill be hard to improve on when next I build!"

A-field, Guilbert's vision ranged over a country inspiring to the eye, a land that flowed with milk and honey, and big with human possibilities. The scene thrilled Guilbert.

"'Tis a goodly land," he mused, looking fondly over the landscape, "and ought to be a happy land. The follies of its rulers and priests are its greatest burden. The sage of Malvern Hill well knows the land's shame. What saith he?"—and

he murmured to himself certain lines from the Vision of Piers the Plowman:—

"In many places the parsons themselves be at ease;
Of the poor they have no pity: and that is their charity!
And they live them as lords, their lands lie so broad.
But there shall come a king and confess you, ye Religious.
And beat you, as the Bible telleth, for breaking your rule,
And amend menials, monks, and canons,
And put them to their penance."

"Will the vision e'er come true?" Guilbert asked himself. "Certainly the times be ripe, and something is toward. The king's officers will surely collect the poll tax. That injustice will rouse a nest of hornets that will stir England these coming days. Revolt is sure to follow. The sad thing about it all is that, in the end, the poor will suffer most. 'To him that hath shall be given.'"

Deep and sonorous beneath his feet, the Angelus bell startled Guilbert out of his reverie. Instinctively, he bent his head in the attitude of reverence and stood still. Where they stood, the craftsmen quietly laid down their tools and paused with bowed heads, as if they too were waiting for some heavenly visitant. From below, in the church, a momentary shuffling of feet on the pavement drifted up to Guilbert, as tardy monks slipped into their places in the chancel. A moment later the voice of Father Fletcher rang out loud and clear, leading the brief service of the Angelus, and the antiphones filled the church and swelled out through the open courts, invading with their petition the surrounding woods.

The *Amen* of the Angelus lingered tenor-like on the air. Then the monks filed across the cloister into the refectory. The workmen laid aside their aprons, put away their tools, and, with the Angelus' mystic spell upon them, passed out to their evening meal and lodging.

Descending, Guilbert paused a moment in the belfry to watch his men leave the church, and then continued on to the foot of the stairs. Through an open window he heard the monks at their evening meal, where the sounds of feasting were decently suppressed in order that the words of the Reader might be heard. St. John was reading, and the familiar voice of his friend halted Guilbert at the foot of the stairs, and he listened.

" 'Oh, how brief, how false, how inordinate and filthy, are all those pleasures! Yet so drunken and blind are men that they understand it not; but, like dumb beasts, for the poor enjoyment of this corruptible life they incur the death of the soul. Thou, therefore, my son, go not after thy lusts, but refrain thyself from thine appetite' "—

Guilbert turned from the homily to close the door. Something about the little area at the foot of the stair attracted his attention and roused his curiosity. He dropped down on his hands and knees and closely scrutinized the little square of pavement. "Well! Well!" he exclaimed with a chuckle, as one who recognizes an old acquaintance in an unexpected place and felicitates himself upon the discovery. With both hands he felt

about the base of the wall. At length his face lighted, and he pushed heavily upon a spot he had discovered. In response to pressure a joint in the floor opened sufficiently for the insertion of his fingers. He raised the stone, and underneath it discovered stone steps leading into subterranean darkness.

Guilbert wondered where the steps might lead. Curiosity urged him on. Remembering a torch standing in the belfry he found it but the work of a moment to fetch it. Then he closed the door upon his operations, and flint, steel and tinder, with a little human breath, soon kindled the torch into a flame. Descending the steps, Guilbert found himself in a dark subway, narrow and low and cobwebby, evidently long out of use, built among the foundations of the church. From its general trend, Guilbert thought he had lighted upon a secret passage to the Chapter House. Feeling his way carefully past several turns in the subway, he came at length to steps similar to those by which he had entered, and there the burrow ended. For a moment he fancied that by some freak of confusion he had travelled in a circle and had returned to his starting point. But the steps mounted to a stone ceiling, and a little investigation showed him that he had come to the end of the secret passage. He would investigate whither the passage led. With his free hand, he repeated the process of pushing and tapping upon the walls by which he had gained entrance. In a little while his sagacity was re-

warded. Something gave way, and he was able to lift a stone in the roof of the passage, whereupon a sudden draught wellnigh extinguished his torch. He carried the torch back a few steps and stood it behind a pillar. Then he returned, ascended the steps, and with his shoulder pushed up the stone trap. One look about him, and he was greatly surprised. His head and shoulders had not invaded the Chapter House as he had expected, but were in the Abbot's bedroom on the further side of the Abbot's House! Hastily, and in some confusion, because of his singular intrusion into so private an apartment, Guilbert sank back into the subway, and after replacing the trap and securing his torch, he picked his way back to the foot of the belfry stairs. After returning the trap to its place, he blew out the torch and carried it back to the belfry. Then he closed the door, passed through the transept into the cloister and by the Abbot's House to the old Gate House, and soon to Thornton.

"Evidently," he mused as he strode through the woods to his supper, "some previous Abbot arranged the subway in order that private espial might be possible upon the monks' devotions. The passage has probably been unknown a hundred years. 'Tis not marked in the old plans! A nice little secret! The Thornton monks shall be no wiser for my discovery."

Guilbert walked briskly Thorntonward, turning over in his mind the secret passage, and wondering about the Green Devil.

CHAPTER III. THE MANOR HOUSE

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THE MANOR HOUSE

IN WHICH A SPURLESS KNIGHT RIDES OUT UPON A QUEST, AND THE END IS NOT YET MADE MANIFEST

His supper ended at the Saracen's Head, Guilbert de Rouen straightway retired to his little room to make his evening toilet. He was in rare spirits, and whistled the tune of a lightsome troubador song, halting the strain only while he bathed his face with cold water and rubbed it vigorously with a rough towel. From an oaken chest he drew a silver comb, and, with the aid of a small steel mirror, straightened out the tangle of his hair. It was but the work of a moment to discard his work-a-day hose and shoes, and to install in their place fine green silken stockings and absurdly long-pointed shoes. Then he put on a red silk tunic and fastened it down the front with a score of silver buttons which bore the crest of his Normandy House. On his belt he hung a French sword of fine workmanship. A little in front of the sword he fastened on his belt a chatelaine, to serve the double purpose of purse and pocket.

His dress in order to his taste, Guilbert took a roll of parchment from a tiny bookshelf at the head of his bed and thrust it into his bosom. Over his shoulders he threw a dark velvet cape lined with creamy silk. Jauntily upon his head he put a

Flanders hat, decorated with the red plume of a foreign bird. Then he stepped lightly through the public bar,—out under the creaking sign of the inn which bore the representation of a Saracen's head,—into the little street which straggled through the village past the church. A groom was waiting with a horse, and Guilbert vaulted into the saddle and trotted leisurely down the street toward the Manor House.

A quarter of a mile or so beyond the last house of the village, the sharp gables of the Manor House came in view in a clearing of the forest. An involuntary tightening of the reins and a prouder seat in the saddle, with a deft touch of the spurs which changed his steed's trot into a lively caracole, failed not to proclaim that the Manor House was the object of Guilbert's evening pilgrimage. The drawbridge was down, and over it Guilbert walked his horse into the courtyard, and then cantered him across the open space, bringing him up on his haunches beneath an open balcony on which sat a group of people enjoying the evening hour. With the air of one quite at home, Guilbert threw himself off his horse and gave the reins into the hands of a waiting groom. He ascended the balcony steps, and the Lady Heloise advanced to greet him.

"You are a tardy knight," she exclaimed. "We began to think that an Abbey wall had fallen on you, Jericho-wise! But you are welcome to the Manor House. Have you news? Or a story? Or will you sing a song?"

"Nay—Nay! Mistress Heloise! You do verily demand the toll at the gate!" Guilbert answered, and laughter lurked in the eyes of them both.

Hearing Guilbert's voice, Sir William called him into the house, saying: "Meet Scrivener Twidale."

A man tall and of heavy frame, his massive head shocked with a mop of long grey hair, his granite features deep cut, sharp and expressive, his eyes set deep under shaggy brows, greeted Guilbert cordially. He carried an inkstained quill behind his ear, and an inkhorn swung at his girdle.

Sir William proceeded, gravely. "It seems that we are likely to be ousted, Guilbert."

"By reason of the filched will?" Guilbert queried.

"Aye, it may be our undoing. Scrivener comes to advise us of the worst. We were debating what should be done."

"How came there to be two wills, Sir William?" Guilbert asked.

"It came about in this way. While campaigning in France, Uncle Thomas fell sick, and he came home expecting to die. They bore him into the house on a litter. I well remember the cold dismal day, being here on a visit at the time. The leeches gave uncle up to die. Then Lady Anne, the dear good soul, sent for the Abbot to give the sick man viaticum. The old Abbot happened to be sick—it was before Thomas de Gretham came to the Abbey—and in his stead he sent Father Fletcher, then a mere stripling of a monk but devilishly

ambitious, who has now got to be the Dean of the Abbey. With him came another shriver, who is now dead, and who, it seems, besides being a monk, was a sort of hedge-scrivener. Just what took place in the sick room no man knows, for uncle never told, and on such matters monks are close as sepulchers! But the monks took with them to the Abbey the last will and testament of Sir Thomas, and stood ready, I doubt not, to ring his passing bell, for the parchment devised the Manor estate to the Abbey, upon the death of the testator. But in spite of priests and leeches, Sir Thomas did not die, but got well again. When he was on his feet, one day he had a stormy time at the Abbey. Just what happened we do not know, but uncle came away triumphant, with the will in his pocket. Shortly afterward uncle sent for Scrivener Twidale and made the will which the Green Devil stole, the will which made me and mine his heirs."

"And left the old will intact?" asked Guilbert.

"Aye; that's the trouble. 'Twas the foolish whim of a wise man. He fancied 'twere better to keep the old will. A man can't be wise all the time!" Sir William added, ruefully.

"Twenty-five years both wills have been safe in our House," said the Scrivener, willing to defend even a dead client. "They would be safe yet, but for this atrocious housebreaking. The House never lost a document before." The old man seemed bent by his novel misfortune.

"There is no clue to the burglar?" Guilbert inquired.

"None, tangible. We really saw naught. The lad woke us, screamingly terribly. I ran to the stairs. The lad ran past me, his eyes like saucers, his hair on end. Two men in Lincoln green slid down the passage and through the door as I looked over the balustrade. The boy says he surely saw the devil! Whom it was I saw, I know not. The street raised hue and cry, and the rout chased two men to the Roman gate. The Sheriff has information that three horsemen kept to the Roman road for ten miles northward. There one rider swung down the hill westward, and Green Devil vanished into thin air in the woods to the east."

"Have you no theory, Scrivener, who the thief may be?"

" 'Twas no common thief. Whosoever stole the will knew the place and what he wanted. He burned the deed that was in force, as is proved by fragments in the ashes. Naught else was disturbed. Beyond this no clue has come to light."

"No suspicion?" questioned Guilbert.

"What a fine man-at-law you would make, Guilbert mine!" The Scrivener looked admiringly on Guilbert. Sir William laughed, then the two waited for Scrivener's answer. Leaning forward on the table, Scrivener was silent a moment, then spoke.

"No suspicion based on evidence, and none specific anyway. But, I'll wager my bay stallion that in the end the stolen will finds its way to the

Abbey. The thief will find his market with the monks who will profit by the deed. Watch the Abbey, Sir William. Treat with the monks if you can."

"Our case is not so bad," said Guilbert. "Surely there is evidence enough that the second will was made. You drew up the document, Scrivener, and can likely swear to its contents. Also you can swear to its being in your keep these years, and to the manner of its disappearance. Possession, also, I may remind you, Sir William, is nine-tenths of the law."

Scrivener shook his shaggy head. "You forget that our courts are almost purely ecclesiastical. A deed drawn in favor of the church, already in the hands of the church, and duly signed and sealed, tangibly produced in court, would outweigh a dozen Scriveners' swearings. The court would think we lied to rob holy church of land. Likelier would we win a prison than our just case. No! Keep an eye on the Abbey. If the will appears, compound as best you can. But be prepared for the worst."

"Still is the case not hopeless," urged Guilbert. "Abbot Thomas is our friend. Moreover he is a righteous man, true as steel, and without the itch for wealth. If the deed should come into his possession, and he knows the truth about it, I'll warrant that he will burn it, as Green Devil burnt the second deed; then will he come to the Manor House to tell us that the deed is out of the way."

"We need not waste fear on the Abbot," said Sir William. "He is tutor to Heloise, and a family friend. But the Dean enters into the problem. He has great power in the Abbey, and 'tis rumored that he wants more. He has votes enough, and to spare, to rule the Chapter. 'Tis whispered that the Dean would be Abbot, were the way clear. If the missing will comes to the Dean's hands we are undone. Then will we either pack up or pay rent."

"Or fight!" added Scrivener dryly. "Swords have defeated the pen before, Sir William."

There was a sudden movement of the arras, and from under the hanging a dwarf tumbled into the room. The company was surprised, especially Scrivener. Then the strange figure's hunched back, long misshapen arms, grotesque attitude, and the comic seriousness of his drawn face made them all laugh good humoredly; in which laugh the dwarf himself joined heartily. The dwarf walked over to the back of Sir William's chair.

"I was sleeping like a dog," he said shamefacedly, and in a curious characteristic drawl. "Your talk woke me. About the stolen will, Sir William, if it be in the Abbey, I'll know. Mayhap Dwarfy will earn his salt yet! Mum's the word!"

With that the natural clown turned a hand-spring out of the room, and Scrivener held his sides in laughter.

"Where did you get the queer imp?" Scrivener asked.

"In Flanders. One dark night he tumbled sud-

denly into my tent, much as you saw him just now make his exit from this room. I wellnigh skewered him with my dagger before I discovered that he was human! He has been in the family ever since, a great pet and a great nuisance, faithful as a hound and useless as a parrot. He's a great baby, but, I warn you, not so big a fool as he likes to look. Moreover, he has the freedom of the Abbey. The monks love him for his pranks. Perchance he may be eyes and ears for us within the walls."

Sir William led the way back to the balcony, where Lady Wellham and Heloise plied their needles on a piece of tapestry, and incidentally kept an approving eye upon the courtyard, where the retainers of the house revelled in old-time English sports. His good footing at the Manor House accounted for the hearty welcome the ladies accorded Guilbert.

"We English are getting ready to repeat Crécy and Poictiers," laughed Heloise, waving her hand over the throng in the courtyard. "Long bows and Englishmen go together—so the French are beginning to think, I am told."

The men laughed. Guilbert shrugged his shoulders and put up his hands in token of surrender to her nimble wit. The twang of bowstrings and the whiz of arrows made music in the courtyard.

"What fine sturdy fellows these English archers are," Guilbert thought. "The yard-shaft seems to be part of themselves as they shoot it to the center of the butt."

"Such men make victory a foregone conclusion," he said, and Sir William accepted the compliment with a courtly bow.

A man's voice carrying the strains of a song attracted attention to the road that wound out of the forest. Presently, a Jongleur and his attendant emerged from the path. The gay man, gaily apparelled, advanced over the drawbridge tossing a flashing circle of daggers in the air, just as his forbear Tailefer had juggled as he led the Norman host into the fight at Hastings three centuries before. Guilbert could now recognize the words of his popular summer song:

"Summer is come in; loud sing cuckoo!
Groweth seed and bloweth mead, and springeth the wood all new;
Ewe bleateth after lamb, loweth after calf cu,[1]
Bullock sterteth[2], buck verteth[3], merry sing cuckoo!
Well sings the cuckoo; never cease thou singing
Never more!"

The courtyard crowded about the Jongleur, the men clapping their hands and crying, "Bravo!" "Bravo!" "More; give us more."

The Jongleur doffed his feathered cap, made a low obeisance to the ladies, and greeted the company with, "Good evening to you all. God bless your merry English sport. Our blessed Lady make you all happy. The Jongleur's greeting to Lady and Sir William Wellham."

The two tricksters stood before the balcony. With such crude apparatus as they could carry

[1] cow. [2] hurries. [3] leapeth.

with them, the Jongleur amused the gaping crowd with those tricks of legerdemain which have opened the eyes and mouths of initiated and uninitiated alike since the world began. His attendant handed him a lute, and while the Jongleur tuned its strings the crowd was silent, anticipating another song. In a rich, easy baritone voice he lifted the quaint old ballad of the Three Ravens,

"There were three ravens sat on a tree,
Downe a downe, hay downe, hay downe,
There were three ravens sat on a tree,
With a downe,
There were three ravens sat on a tree,
They were as black as they might be,
With a downe derrie, derrie, derrie, downe, downe

The one of them said unto his mate,
'Where shall we our breakfast take?'

'Down in yonder green field
There lies a knight slain under his shield.

'His hounds they lie down at his feet,
So well they can their master keep.

'His hawks they flie so eagerly
There is no fowl dare come him nigh.'

Down there comes a fallow doe,
As great with young as she might goe.

She lifted up his bloody head,
And kist his wounds that were so red.

She got him up upon her back,
And carried him to earthen lak.[1]

[1] shroud.

She buried him before the prime,
She was dead herself before evensong time.

God send every gentleman
Such hawks, such hounds, and such a leman.[1]"

The tune to which the Jongleur sang the ballad was half chant and half melody, admirably fitted to express the quaint sentiment. He sang the witching refrain after all the couplets, and its last line he gave with a "retard" and "hold" effect upon every word. The rich quality of his voice gave it the effect of a lullaby, sung to put the soul of the dead knight to sleep.

For a moment silence fell upon the company, then hearty applause brought a bow from the Jongleur in which the gay feather in his hat swept the ground. He moved towards the balcony, and the retainers, doubtless thinking him about to enter the house, loitered off towards the barnyard, led by sturdy Martin Reeve and Ralph Shepherd.

Sir William and his guests came down to meet the Jongleur, and Guilbert put into his hand a gold coin.

"Have you news under your hat?" said Sir William. "Will the villeins revolt? What gather you on your travels?"

The Jongleur's face fell grave, and he replied soberly, "Aye, my men, the country is in a bad way. Everywhere men are hungry. They growl in the fields, munching barley bread, herding hogs

[1] sweetheart.

better-fed than themselves. Misery has been with them so long that they could hardly live without it. There will be a blaze ere long. Blood will flow, skulls will crack, the torch will become a sword, and mayhap a king will be toppled off his throne." The man's gaiety was all gone, and his face looked the woe he spoke for others.

"Think you our Green Devil heads the villeins' cause hereabouts?" queried Scrivener.

The Jongleur shook his head sharply. "Nay! Nay! That's a lie. Likelier he is one of the oppressors," he answered.

"Abide at the Manor House awhile, Sir Jongleur. Mayhap together we may plan to mend matters."

"Nay, good Sir William, I can but eat your bread and lie in your bed tonight. Tomorrow we make the Barton ferry, and thence on to York. Tonight only; but gladly tonight. But suffer me first to sing a stable ditty to the fellows below your salt," waving his hand to where the retainers lolled among the ricks. "Then will I talk an arm off for you, if you will!"

Sir William laughed. The Jongleur tripped lightly across the courtyard, Sir William and Scrivener entered the house, and Guilbert fell to examining the "knight-a-hawking," the gay colors of whose attire was, stitch by stitch, appearing on the tapestry, under the magic touches of Heloise's needle.

"You like it?" queried Heloise.

"'Tis beautiful," Guilbert answered, and the Lady Wellham smiled.

From the barnyard there wafted to the balcony sounds of hilarity. Snatches of sundry camp and ale house ditties indicated that the men were in a high key of glee. The jolly laughter and the songs Guilbert heard. But he did not hear a sort of mysterious password which the Jongleur whispered into the ear of Martin Reeve, and which that man passed in like manner to his neighbor, and so on until the secret word was the possession of all. Guilbert heard the men slapping each other on the back. Then they broke forth into the popular Miller-song, the baritone of the Jongleur leading.

Presently the Jongleur returned across the courtyard. Guilbert met him at the foot of the balcony steps. As they ascended to the balcony the Jongleur covertly whispered into Guilbert's ear, "Tuesday of the full moon, midnight in the glen. Fail not."

It was the self-same sign that had raised the Miller-song in the barnyard.

CHAPTER IV. THE OLD, OLD STORY

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THE OLD, OLD STORY

IN WHICH A MAN PUTS A CERTAIN ANCIENT QUESTION IN A NOVEL WAY, WITH RESULTS SUFFICIENTLY UNSATISFACTORY, ONE WOULD IMAGINE, TO DISCOURAGE FURTHER EXPERIMENT

As Lady Wellham followed the Jongleur into the hall she remarked that the air was chilly. But the witching twilight lured Guilbert and Heloise to stay outdoors, for to them the air was delightfully fresh, while it was so close in the house! Keeping step they crossed the courtyard together, and a rustic wicket, almost hidden by vines that clambered over its archway, received them into the garden, where they traversed the clean gravel paths between trim hedges of dwarf boxwood that wound among the flower beds.

On lazy wing, a cuckoo bore his plaintive note from tree to tree. "What an uninspiring subject for poetry!" exclaimed Guilbert, as they watched the bird's heavy flight. When the bird alighted in the top of a tree and produced his two notes with a marked stutter, Guilbert laughed, and added, "His song, too, falls short of even suggesting poetry!"

"He is a lazy fellow, plaintive, and woefully dishonest!" Heloise answered. "But, hark you!

Here is our throstle, and he is the veritable king of songsters," she added, as they seated themselves on the rustic bench by the fountain, while from a near-by holly a throstle flooded the garden with the marvel of his song.

They listened awhile with breathless interest, and then Guilbert exclaimed, "'Tis perfect! Were it a little later in the evening he might be taken for a nightingale. The plainer the feather, the sweeter the song."

They watched the fish play in the fountain, and the ripple of dripping water fell dreamily upon their ears.

"The music of the Three Ravens haunts me," said Guilbert, sitting close to Heloise on the bench. "The Jongleur sang it right well. You English love war. How the ballad stirred your archers! That rugged whelp of war, old Martin Reeve, gripped his hand as though it held a bow, and his eye fired while the Jongleur sang. But you English play a losing game in these interminable French wars. In course of time, the French and English crowns must become independent of each other. On this side the channel I notice that a new tongue is forming, and my France becomes more national every day. Your Chaucer, Langland, and Wyclif vex scholars with this new trick of writing in the vulgar vernacular. Believe me, your vernacular will outlast your Latin, and in time French will only be spoken in France. I'll warrant that, in time, language will prove to be a more efficient bar-

rier between the two countries than is the choppy channel! 'Twere better if the fight could be ended."

"I like not war," Heloise responded, a touch of sadness in her voice. "Bitterness lies behind its pomp, and every victory means somebody's defeat. Yet was I all but cradled on a shield, and war fills our English world. The plow is irksome to our men, and weeds thrive where grain should ripen. The blast of a bugle clears our fields of men better than harvest-wains clear the same fields of shocks —and the easier bugle does the work more quickly, and, moreover, leaves no gleanings! In these days we beat our plowshares into swords, rather than the reverse, which our good Abbot Thomas says we should do. My father would rather wear the sword in his lifetime and at his death be covered with his shield, like the knight in the ballad, than be my lord the Primate. Some evil spirit must have sown our land with dragon teeth, for armed men is the only sure crop we raise! I like it not. It sickens me at heart. Scholars, schools, parchments, illuminations, are of the world I love best, and I like to see the acres billowy with ripening grain. I would rather pin favors on scholars at contests of nimble wit than award prizes to puissant knights at gorgeous tourneys. Were I a monk, I would live in the scriptorium, and, were it mine to give, I could lavish a fortune on illuminations and illuminators."

Her spirit highly pleased Guilbert, and he looked upon her with open admiration. Her mantle had

fallen from her shoulders, and the sight of a jeweled cross rising and falling with her bosom sent the blood at a quicker pace through Guilbert's veins, and the low music of her voice stirred him deeply and mysteriously. Her reference to illuminations seemed to add to his pleasure.

"Your Thornton St. John illuminates marvellously," he said, taking up the cue.

"He is a good man," Heloise answered, with appreciation strong in her voice. "He has a good head, a good heart, and a cunning hand among the very best. Some of his work will be praised long after he is dead."

The color came to Guilbert's face. "St. John is a friend I prize above many," he said, as he drew a dainty parchment from his bosom. "He illuminated this text for me, and I have brought it for you."

As he spoke, Guilbert handed the parchment to Heloise, watching her closely the while. When her eye fell upon the illumination an exclamation escaped her lips, and her eyes danced for joy.

"It is a gem, Guilbert," she said, "a rare gem, a very rare gem! St. John did it? It is the best I have seen from his hand."

"Yes. I had St. John illuminate it for you. Look it over. The twilight will render its richness the softer. It is my chateau across the channel. I outlined the drawing, St. John did the wizard work. The little poem, Heloise, is my message to you. Our building at the Abbey will soon be

done, and then I must away. Before I go I give you this. Read it, and see."

As Guilbert spoke the parchment had fallen upon her lap, and as she became aware of the nature of its contents, her face clouded and tears came into her eyes. The couplets of a little poem, done in neat, black, geometrical letters, occupied the center of a page provided with generous margins. In the center of the top margin gleamed a French chateau, vignetted in grey stone, its sharp pitched roofs red-tiled, the great house all be-walled and be-moated, the drawbridge down, the portcullis up, the barriers thrown wide open.

In the right upper corner of the page was painted the interior of a lady's bower, but with no lady sitting therein, the cozy room waiting like an open cage for its bird. The chamber seemed lonely minus music from the lute that hung mute upon the wall, and song was missed from the boudoir's open casements and laughter from its fireless hearth. Would that some one might take down the lute, light a fire on the cold hearth, and woo the spirit of love till it would come and haunt the boudoir!—So the picture seemed to say. The left upper corner of the broad margin was illuminated with a small full-length portrait of Guilbert, colored to life. The initials of the poem were curiously drawn in red and green and gold, and down the broad side margins the illuminator's fancy had tripped fruitfully. Reeds rustled on the shore of a little mere, and birds sailed the air as though they would invade

the text. All this Heloise grasped with appreciation, and then her eye fell upon the poem. This is what she read, with Guilbert's eye fixed intently upon her face the while,

"Knight I, with empty bower, on quest am come;
O Lady, love, sweetheart, ride with me home.

Knight I, in thy fair face find I my quest;
My lady love, with me be Love's life-guest.

Knight I, with honor's sword will I thee guard;
Fair lady, love, be thou my heart's dear ward.

Knight I, live I the red red rose Romaunt;
Love, thorns I'd press to kiss thy lips among.

Knight I, sweet bells I hear o'er landscape wide;
Old lady fair, dear love, be thou my bride."

It was but a crude, halting poem, but it was his own, and it quaintly expressed what was in his heart. But as Heloise perused the parchment Guilbert divined that his quest was in vain. Her eyes sought the ground, scarlet mantled her cheeks, and she averted her face. Guilbert sat in fear. He dared not speak, lest his words should render his case more hopeless. At length Heloise put a hand upon his arm, and with great tenderness she broke the silence.

"The poem is charming," she said, speaking slowly and weighing her words. "The verses are as lovely as St. John's embellishment of them. But, Guilbert, I pray you forgive me, for I fear

that I have done you wrong. It was thoughtless of me not to have seen long ago whereunto our comradeship might lead. The selfishness of my enjoyment blinded me, I fear—"

Guilbert put up his hand as though to hush her words.

"Nay; I must tell you, now," she continued. "There must be no further misunderstanding between us. Greatly have I enjoyed your companionship while you have been at Thornton. From the outside world you have brought me generous portions of the things I love. I have almost lived in Europe while you have been here. But I must be honest with you, and also with myself. I do not love you; I cannot love you; what you ask is impossible."

"But—" pleaded Guilbert, earnestly.

"No; no, Guilbert. It is no use. Love is a thing by itself, and I know my heart. Honor, respect, admiration, companionship of the mere intellect, these you have had of me, and these you may still have, if you will, but nothing more, nothing deeper, nothing higher, none of what you most want. We have been good comrades of the head, but our hearts have not touched, and you know that love is of the heart much more than it is of the head. I fear that my thoughtlessness has allowed me unconsciously to stir the passion in you when it had no place in myself. I do not love you, Guilbert de Rouen, therefore to your poem I must say nay."

"Hear me, Heloise, Mine is true love, and it is

of that within me which has given you the pleasure you acknowledge. I am not moved by the accidentals. Not for your face do I love you, nor for your rank, but for your very self. Your alert mind, your sympathetic heart, your great soul—you yourself have entered into me, and already you are a part of my life. Come a little farther, and be my wife. Let us henceforth live our lives wholly together."

"Friend Guilbert," answered Heloise, in superb command of herself, and with evident concern lest what she said should further wound instead of heal. "Freely I will tell you that your ideal of love is mine. Did I love you as you love me I would away with you to France, and doubtless we would be happy. But, you know that I follow the ideal. Short of my vision, even for my poor self, I dare not stop. Until love awake in me, divine, regnant, according to my ideal, and also according to yours, I must remain unwed. It would be a grave injustice to us both for me to wed you, drawn to you by less than the very highest love. We could never be even seemingly happy, not to speak of the ideal happiness which belongs to the wedded life. In the end it would slay the soul of us both. We should sink to the level of the beasts, being wedded merely physically. Neither of us would venture on that experience. Though it hurts you sorely, truly I must say nay, and must say it firmly, and for good.—The dew is falling, and the air grows chilly. I must in to the house," and, as

she arose from the bench she gave the parchment back to Guilbert.

Her loveless words chilled Guilbert. For him the magic slipped from the twilight, the music departed from the ripple of the fountain, and the garden lost its charm. "Nay, nay, my Lady Heloise," he urged, and, bending on one knee, he gave the parchment back into her hand. "Keep it for the sake of the art, if not for my sake. You will not banish me from your friendship? Let the roll betoken that which we have enjoyed since I have been in Thornton. It will pledge me your unrequited knight. You may love another, yet will I remain true to your service."

"Truly, I love no other," hastily protested Heloise. "That note has not yet been struck in my life, and perhaps it never will be struck." A moment or two she mused, then she turned to Guilbert and added: "Yes, I will keep the illumination as an unneeded pledge of your chivalry. We may be friends still, but I am afraid that you will find that hard, and in the end I fear that we must drift apart."

Guilbert caught eagerly at her words. "I will be silent," he said. "On the matter of love, as silent as the grave; and you shall be free—as free as love itself." For a moment neither spoke. The fountain trickled in the failing twilight, and laughter wafted down to them from the kitchen where the domestics made merry.

A great sadness was in her voice when she an-

swered. "Guilbert," she said, weighing her words with deliberation. "Quite certain am I that it were better for us that we should part, here and now. I feel more than I can put into words. I would spare you, if I could. To hold to a lost cause is to live only through dark and hopeless days. I can never love you—"

"Then let us be the good friends we were before I spoke," Guilbert broke in upon her. "And let us not raise between us this barrier of words. Your silent, and your hopeless knight will I be."

At length Heloise spoke. "My friendship will I give, even as I have. But it can grow to nothing more," she said, and something strangely like tears lurked in her eyes and in her voice. She reached out her hand, and reverently Guilbert raised it to his lips.

"Grant me a final boon," he pleaded as he held her hand.

"And what may that be?" she queried, and the unconscious humor that lurked in his request almost brought a smile to her face.

Guilbert was quiet, and grave, and earnest, when he answered. "In these troubled times one never knows what may happen," he said. "Promise me this. Should it happen that you need my help in any matter whatsoever, promise to call on me, even as though I had that right to protect you which I have sought this day, and which you have refused."

"You are a brave, generous man," she an-

swered, and her voice trembled with emotion. Then there came to her mind the strange jumble of the times—the stolen will, the mystery of the Green Devil, and the villeins' revolt which wise-acres prophesied. Out of such threatening, what storms might arise? She felt that, somehow or other, her fortune was involved in the outcome of these events. She might need the assistance of a strong arm. Then she spoke the words which, all his protesting to the contrary notwithstanding, came to Guilbert as a faint ray of hope.

"Guilbert," she said. "I will surely do it. In need, I will call upon you, my generous friend."

Slowly they came up the garden path. The shadows had fallen, both within and without. The little wicket creaked on its hinges as Guilbert opened it on their way out of the garden. At the door of the house Guilbert excused himself when Heloise would have had him enter as of yore, and there, with a heavy heart, he bade her a good night.

Guilbert took the bridle rein from the groom, but was in no mood to mount, so he led his horse over the drawbridge and out into the woods. A nightingale flung its song out into the night from a thicket near the pathway, but Guilbert did not hear. He almost collided with Abbot Thomas in the road as the Abbot was walking toward the Manor House, and so mastered by his defeat was Guilbert that he barely apologized for his rudeness, or even recognized the man he had met. He walked toward Thornton as in a dream. Unconsciously

he wandered a few yards from the beaten path, and there he came upon Dean Fletcher, who was hugging the shadows as he stole upon his way, also toward the Manor House. It needed the second monk to remind Guilbert that he had met the first. When Guilbert spoke Dean Fletcher good night, that worthy answered something inarticulate, and passed on, and Guilbert promptly forgot that he had met monks that night. He had not yet regained the path which he had heedlessly forsaken, when Dwarf Henry dodged by him in the brush, and passed on in the wake of the two monks, without word or sign. But Guilbert was too stunned to see, or rightly to note what he saw. The three curious events came not together in his mind, and so he came to his room at the Saracen's Head.

CHAPTER V. THE PEOPLE'S PLAINT

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THE PEOPLE'S PLAINT

IN WHICH FEAST AND PLOT TOGETHER, HOLD THE STAGE, AND VILLEINS PLAN TO BETTER THEIR SAD CASE

When the full moon almost obliterated the short summer night, mine host, Tom Danby of the Saracen's Head, knocked gently at the door of Guilbert's room, at an hour when the last customer had drifted from the bar, and the honest village lay asleep. Answering the summons so promptly that one might judge he must have been expecting it, Guilbert de Rouen joined Danby in the hallway, and the two stole quietly towards the outer door of the inn.

The two men hugged the shadows down the street. At the fork of the road near the Manor House they halted. A low whistle from Danby awoke an echo under the lea of the big house, and a moment or two later Martin Reeve and Ralph Shepherd fell in behind Guilbert and mine host, and the quartette silently took the trail into the forest.

Half an hour later a noble buck loped across the path in an open glade. Silently as the fall of dew, Martin and Ralph slipped into cover, and instinctively Guilbert and Danby halted breathless where

they stood. "We shall have venison for the Brotherhood tonight," quoth Danby under his breath.

Five minutes had barely passed when a shrill whistle signalled from the wood. Guilbert and Danby plunged into the coppice. In a little ravine they came upon the Nimrods gloating over their quarry. Two arrows still quivered behind the deer's shoulder. It was but the work of a few minutes for these wood-wise men to dress the deer. Then they slung the carcass on a stout sapling, and, spelling each other as they needed, they bore it with them on their march.

About midnight, the party was challenged by two armed men, who demanded of them the countersign. "Christ's friends and the poor," answered Guilbert, and at the significant words the sentries' spears dropped. Half a mile beyond the sentinels, the timber fell away into an amphitheatre-like glade, down which a little stream made music.

The glade swarmed with men. It seemed as though Guilbert's party had suddenly come upon a midnight fairyland. Men were everywhere. As they reclined on the grass some slept, others sat in groups on boulders and fallen logs, kept awake by earnest conversation; still others strolled about the glade in twos and threes; and here and there a leather jerkin or a russet smock, perched on a convenient log, addressed his fellows in fiery speech. Near two hundred men were already in the glade, and new-comers constantly added to the number.

A man advanced to meet Guilbert. "I'm captain

of the district in the People's Cause. My name's La Rue, Guilliame La Rue. Welcome here, Guilbert de Rouen. We need such as you. This is a prophecy of things to come," said he, sweeping his hand over the glade.

"Is it secret?" queried Guilbert. "How can you gather such numbers without the thing being known? Men-at-arms will break you up."

"It is the people that rise," La Rue answered promptly, "and the people can keep their secret. But were this known, not a hand would lift in the county to betray us, except perhaps among the crown officers, and many of them be with us at heart. But, not a word is abroad. The county is dotted with such gatherings tonight. You must meet Brother Barr," La Rue added, as one dressed in the russet of Wyclif's Poor Priests came up. "Brother Barr, this is Guilbert de Rouen, of whom I told you, and who is with us in the Cause."

The stranger held out his hand cordially. Guilbert eyed the man narrowly.

"Have we not met before?" he asked quizzically. Then his face lighted. "By sonties," he exclaimed, shaking the extended hand heartily. "The Jongleur! Well! Well! Belong you to the Cause?"

"Aye, long before you," replied the russet priest. "Right glad am I to see you, sir. Kent has overflowed into Lincolnshire. Until tonight I feared that Lincolnshire would lag. I'm glad you brought meat. Already we have three deer and a

beef,—enough for a feast and fragments to take home."

By a huge crackling fire men roasted spits of venison and beef. Among the men who thronged the glen the rough, stolid, hunger-pinched type of face prevailed. Most, though not all, were of the villeinage and were russet-clad. Neighboring towns contributed to the gathering not a few turbulent apprentices. A few men, like Guilbert de Rouen, were present not because they had ills of their own crying for remedy, but by reason of their sympathy with the poor. They were the natural leaders of the revolt, and unto them Guilbert straightway joined himself.

"People mistake Green Devil for an agent of the People's Cause," said Guilbert.

The leaders protested vehemently.

"He's as damnable a mystery to us as to the rest of the world," answered Brother Barr. "An we catch him, we'll hang him to a tree and stick him full of arrows. He blasts the cause with his lust and violence, and maltreats poor and rich, men and women, young and old alike. He's only for himself!"

The roasts were done, rich, brown, and of a savory smell. As by magic appeared oaten cakes and barley loaves, rye bread and baked beans. La Rue made the people sit down on the grass. Forthwith the feast was served, minus a good many condiments the rich constantly enjoyed, but plus beef and venison above the common lot of the poor.

Food loosened the villeins' tongues, and many a tale of distress found expression about the roaring fire.

The plaint of the Keelby Patriarch, soon distinguished itself to Guilbert's ear. At first the old man did but talk to his elbow-fellow by the fire. But the horror of the ancient's tale soon raised his voice and stilled neighboring tongues, and ere he had finished he was unconsciously pouring his woe into the public ear.

"Well, ye all know," he was saying when first Guilbert distinguished his voice among the rest. "Me an' Betty have been Keelby Manor thralls these fifty years or more. I was born on the place. When the old lord came to die, somehow his heart softened. He gave us little bits of parchment that said we was free. They were tiny scratchments splotched with red. The priest who clerked them said the red was the seal that made the scratchment so it would stand against the lawyers. Well, we lived on in the old cot just the same—Betty an' me, an' Jack, an' Will, an' Jim. We worked for the young master just as we used to do for him that was gone. Only he paid us a little bit of wage, an' we wore no collar, but was free to come and go if ever the work was done. The little cot looked fine those days when we wore no man's collar. Our wages were but little, but they sort of kept the wolf from the door.

"Then came the Plague a-killing off poor folk. Both villeins and free men became scarce—so many were dead, piled in pits an' covered with dirt. By

the holy mass, Gabriel will have a big job with them heaps of dead uns! Why, more poor folks was buried than the priests could say masses for. So many were dead that few were left to delve and plow and sow, and good harvests rotted because there were too few to reap.

"Somehow we lost the scrap of parchment with the red splotch, worse luck for it. Jack swore that the Reeve had thieved it so he could get the collar on our necks again. There's deviltry enough in law and lawyers to thieve rest from the dead, and heaven from the saints. Anyhow, the young lord swore that we never had been free, and he made us work again without any wages.

"We talked back and forth, hot-headed, the young lord and us. Holy Mother, we had no chance, because he was rich and we was poor. About that time, up comes the tax gatherer for the poll tax. That looks as if we was free, doesn't it? Villeins pay no tax any more than the other cattle do. It's seven or eight months past now, an' I wish it was years. The tax man wanted more than we could save from rye bread and beans in a whole year. I up an' told him we couldn't pay. He threapped that we could and would, or there would be the devil to pay.

"An' Annie—that's Jack's little wench, an' her mother died of the Plague, God rest her poor soul—was a-sitting in the chimney corner, a-huddled up because she was so afraid of the roystering man. The devil leered at the wench—you know

how—an' he says, says he, 'Maybe Blue Eyes with the gold hair will pay me the tax!' An' he made as if he would lay his foul hands upon her. Whereupon Jack, he up and grabs the foul devil by the collar and flung him out into the yard. I thought he had broken his back against the fence. We all trembled for what was likely to follow, but none of us would have had him stay his hand. It was good to see the leering devil shot out of the door.

"Mad as a wet hen, the tax man went straightway to the Manor House to sue us for the poll tax. In the afternoon the constable came with what he called a warrant. He clapped the shackles on the four of us and haled us before the young lord. At the Manor House they seemed to forget all about the poll tax. The lawyers brought it in that we were villeins to the Manor. They had parchments there to show it! We had lost ours! Mayhap, ours was among theirs! Never had we been free, they said, and we now owed the young lord all the money he had wrongfully paid us for wages. So they clapped us all into the dungeon that night, and Betty and Annie were left in the cot alone."

The recollection broke the old man as upon a wheel, and his voice choked with sobs. An ominous stillness had seized the villeins and they held their breath for the old man to continue. At length the Patriarch pulled himself together and went on with his story.

"Early in the morning they opened the dungeon

door. With the hateful collar once again on our necks we went out. But we minded not the collar then. We made straight for the cot, Jack leading with long strides, all of us hot with rage and fear. We found the door battered down, and we feared to go in. But after a moment or two we entered. Betty, dear old Betty, we found gagged and tied to a chair. We sprang to unbind her, but she motioned her head to a corner where it was dark.

"There we found Annie—poor little Annie with the golden hair and laughing blue eyes, all but dead, and fearful to look upon. We never thought that she could live. Secretly we were glad that she could not live to know the shame. But Providence is mighty queer! She began to mend. Then we fell to praying to the blessed Virgin that she might die, and the old priest said that verily 'twas not a wicked prayer, because it was the prayer of love and Annie was surely better dead than alive.

"Jack was wild with grief and rage. Next day, when we did not know whether the little wench would die or live, Jack went out and slew the tax-gatherer, right out in the open where everybody could see him, and no one in the street put forth a hand to stay him. For everybody knew right well that 'twas the tax man who had done the damnable thing.

"Poor little Annie had not yet stood upon her feet when officers of Justice (God save the mark!) came and gibbetted Jack at the cross roads. And

there he hangs today, O my brothers, a villein no longer, wearing no man's collar, but food for crows! Thank God, the rusty chain collar about his neck makes him nobody's slave. But, O my brothers, there be wrongs to right and perchance to die for! Anon there will be another mouth for rye and beans in our poor cot, and another slave will have been born into the wicked world. O Lord! how long till the day of retribution do come; till the people break away from the yoke of bondage!"

The old man collapsed with the end of his plaint, and there burst from the throng words not lawful to write, but which, translated into the king's English, meant that the Day of the Lord was nigh, and that it would be a day of retribution for wrong-doers in England.

Then, with a fallen log for his rostrum, Guilbert de Rouen told the people of the Jacquerie uprising in France,—how it was put down most ruthlessly, and gibbets were more numerous than crows, and that the rising failed because the poeple were headless and hasty and had not yet learned to act together. Time was now come in England, he said, when men should profit by the French failure and not court new failure, when peasants should organize, should be obedient to chosen chiefs, should subordinate private feud to public good, and should be true brothers and brave. When villeins got the upper hand, as they surely would, they must not be cruel and vengeful, but must show mercy, so that all the land should come to happi-

ness, and no man, be he rich or poor, should have cause to fear his brother or the law.

A fierce buzz of conversation ensued upon the close of Guilbert's speech, and the greater part of his auditors doubted whether the speaker were friend or foe. It was the russet priest who saved the situation. From a lute hung about his neck he drew plaintive chords, and the strains of music fastened all eyes upon the player and silenced all tongues. From a large boulder the priest commanded his audience, and, accompanying himself on the lute, he began, half chant and half melody, the popular people's ditty:

"John Ball greeteth you all,
And would you understand he hath rung your bell.
Now Right and Might, Will and Skill,
God speed you every one."

The effect was immediate and marvelous. Instantly, at the mention of John Ball, his whole audience sprang to foot and came to ear. The russet troubador continued, strumming his lute by way of interlude:

"Help Truth, and Truth shall help you,
Now reigneth Pride in price,
And Covetice is counted wise,
And Lechery withouten shame,
And Glutteny withouten blame,
Envy reigneth with treason,
And Sloth is taken in great season.
God do bote: for now 'tis time."

The glen rang with applause. Then, Martin Reeve leading, every man joined in singing the

stanza. When the men ceased singing Brother Barr struck up the Miller's Song, the most popular ditty of the Cause, and instantly every man was with him, singing as though for dear life.

The priest swung his lute behind his back, and put forth his hand to calm the multitude that he might speak.

"My good people," he began. "Things are in a bad way in merrie England, and are likely to go worse till we mend them. Poll tax and labor laws, rogue lawyers and wicked priests, rape and murder commoner than pennies, awful sin in high places and hunger among the poor, make the times hard and men miserable. Something is to be done, and we are to do it. Things cannot go thus forever. Goods and lands should be held by the people in common. There should be no villeins, and no gentlemen or nobles. Tell me, my brothers, how are the lords of the land more men than we? They were born as we, and as we shall they die, and you cannot tell their dust from ours. Of one father and mother came we all, and to one great family we all belong.

'When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who then, pray, was gentleman?'

"The good book saith we be all brethren. Why should they be clothed in velvet, and their blood-brothers go in rags? Should their tables groan, and we have no tables at all, but eat oaten cakes and coarse beans out of horny hands, and drink only of the wayside stream? I tell you, my broth-

ers, of your unrequited toil comes all they have. But for you they would be worse off than you. Their feet are out of the mire because they stand daintily on your shoulders.

"But there comes a new time—a time of the People's banded Brotherhood. Nobles have long been banded. Now let the people band, and stand or fall together. When the word is passed, Kent is ready to rise. We have to hold them back till the other counties be ready, lest they go on alone, so eager are they for the fray.

"Old John Wyclif is surely with us. He does not so announce, for, perhaps, that were bad policy. But his preachers preach with us, and teach the people of the same brotherhood and rule of rightness. We have friends, too, high at court and castle. But on them we do not depend. What is done must be done by the people who have suffered.

"But, brothers, you must be patient. We must all be patient,"—and he turned significantly to the leaders. "We must learn the lesson Guilbert de Rouen just taught us. What he said about the French rising was all too true, and we must profit by it. Our rising can hardly be until spring. Till then you must lie still. Show not your discontent. Suffer silently. Follow toil as before. Give the king's officers no hold on you by any breaking of the law. Make no disturbance. Live blamelessly. But hold yourselves ready for the passing of the word. Till that time comes I ask you,"—and the speaker's tones became grave and his manner most

solemn—"I ask you, men, brothers, brother sufferers; will you be ready to join the men of Kent when spring-time comes?"

As one man the assembly sent back the answer, "Aye, we will be ready," with such hearty good will that Guilbert's latent fears for the success of the movement were allayed, and he cheered with the rest. Then the men in the glen embraced, and kissed, and slapped each other on the back, and pledged each the other for the revolt.

A messenger strode out of the woods from the sentinel east of the glen and sought La Rue. After brief conference one of the group winded a horn lightly, and the pickets ran in. In a few words La Rue published the news. The Sheriff of Lincoln and a strong posse held the Thornton road, but they evidently had no knowledge of the meeting. They were hot upon the trail of the Green Devil, who had again broken out, and who was likely to be caught this time. At this fair prospect the men cheered; for rape, and murder, and theft, and arson, were no part of the people's plot for liberty.

The company melted away into the forest as it had gathered. Guilbert lingered for a parting word with Barr and La Rue.

"I would you might have the spies keep an open eye for the stolen will," he said. "'Tis likely that some gipsy or huckster band have it in possession, and will try to sell it to the Abbey, being Green Devil's go-between. 'Twere worth a splintered head or two to gain that parchment. I'll

reward the man who runs the parchment down, and Sir William will not be less grateful."

"I'll pass the word along," responded La Rue. "Sir William is so nearly of us that 'twould be a good stroke of policy to make him debtor to our cause. The spies shall be on the watch."

Just before Guilbert's party reached the Thornton road, homeward bound, they heard a horse gallop by at a killing pace. No sooner had the road been reached than there were signs of horsemen behind them, and presently they were overtaken by the Sheriff and a posse of full twenty men.

"Guilbert de Rouen, you are an early riser," cried the Sheriff, spurring ahead of his party to the side of the pedestrians.

"You too, Sir Sheriff, sleep not late," replied Guilbert. "The early hunt is the best. Our bag will be full ere the sun heat the woods. Let me present you with game."

At a motion from Guilbert, Martin dove his hand into the game pouch, and, somewhat reluctantly, drew therefrom a brace of woodcocks, and made as if to hand them to the Sheriff.

"Nay, nay, good Guilbert, we have no time this morn for game or sportsmen. We have trailed the Green Devil since midnight, and are hot upon the scent. We came close upon him at Brocklesby. At Ulceby his gang broke up, and the leader struck out north, riding hard a dapple grey. He rode by here not long ago. See, here is his trail. He was

riding furiously. We'll catch him yet and feed his carrion to the crows—"

"Now, who comes here," continued the Sheriff, scanning the road ahead towards Thornton.

"'Tis but Dean Fletcher of the Abbey, Sir Sheriff.—Good morn to you, Dean Fletcher, you are astir early," answered Guilbert, between the Dean and the Sheriff.

"Sickness and the mortal peril of a soul call me forth, Guilbert mine," answered the priest. Then turning to the horsemen he lifted his hand conventionally and pronounced the word, *Benedicite*, and added, "Fare you well, and may your morning ride be pleasant." He tucked his hands again into his sleeves across his bosom, and strode by the cavalcade, upon his ghostly mission.

Turning in his saddle the Sheriff called after him. "Sir Dean, have you seen any a-foot this morning? We pursue the outlaw known as the Green Devil. He rode by here but a little while ago on a dapple grey. Saw you any one a-saddle or a-foot as you came?"

"No, Sir Sheriff," answered the priest, turning in the middle of the road beyond the cavalcade. "I met no one between here and the Abbey gate." Then he turned to continue his journey, his eyes cast meditatively upon the ground. He had not gone more than a score of steps before he turned again and called back, "Said you your fugitive rode a dapple grey?"

"Aye, that he did. Saw you aught of man or horse?"

"Now I bethink me," answered the monk, " I did see a horse grazing by the road a little beyond the corner yonder. Aye, and the beast was grey." Then Father Fletcher passed on to give the consolation of the church to the dying.

Very quickly the Sheriff spread his posse into the woods on either flank of the road. A little beyond the bend, the Sheriff and Guilbert came upon the dapple grey. But she was not grazing. The beast stood stock still, dripping sweat, her nose on the ground, tricklets of blood running from her nostrils, trembling in every limb like an aspen leaf. Guilbert sickened at the sight.

"The devil left her here less than ten minutes ago," cried the Sheriff. "He can not have gone far away. "He's trapped at last— Men! see to your bows and scour the woods."

But there was mystery to unravel. The rider of the grey horse had seemingly vanished into thin air, and left behind not a single clue.

CHAPTER VI A FAMILY TUTOR

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A FAMILY TUTOR

WHEREIN THE READING OF AN ANCIENT ROMANCE PROVOKES SLY YOUNG CUPID TO PUSH ON TO DANGEROUS GROUND TWO WHO BELONG TO THIS STORY

When the August sun had bronzed the standing grain, and the sickles of the villeinage were reaping harvest, Thomas de Gretham, Abbot of Saint Mary's at Thornton, was seated one afternoon in the oak room of the Manor House. He toyed absent-mindedly with a book on the table near which he sat. Too familiar was he with the apartment to be entertained by the storied tapestry which draped the walls. Through the open lattices the August sun flooded the room with light. Droning bees, the twitter of birds in the shrubbery, the bleating of sheep in the paddock, the low buzz of conversation among the peasants working in the garden—none of these things touched him as he sat waiting. He lay back comfortably in his chair, simply waiting for something or somebody, and while he waited his mind wandered in dreamland, oblivious of the work-a-day world in which his body dwelt.

The Abbot of St. Mary's was a man of striking appearance, well-groomed with good fortune. The

stooping shoulders of the scholar were draped with the habit of an Austin Canon. His intellectual face was plump and hearty with good nature, and smiled with a cheeriness which seemed to be the device by which the good world within the man was introduced to the good world without. From his mother's breasts he had drawn into his nature the select instincts of castled nobility. A private tutor had guided him through such education as the times afforded to sons of wealth, and when the youth awakened intellectually, it was with a keen avidity to know and feel the good world into which he had been propitiously born. The Church stood beside the Castle, and the sword or the crosier was the only weapon with which a man might carve out distinction for himself. The knighthood of the heart and intellect appealed successfully to the young man, and, looking crosierward, he entered the Church. There birth, and brains, and friends had brought him to the fat Abbacy of Thornton while the morning of life was still strong in his soul. He had taken to the religious life as a duck takes to water. His vows of chastity and honor he had faithfully kept. He was a thoroughly good man, and he had won a good man's mead of friends and enemies.

Abbot Thomas's rule at Thornton had at first brought harmony and prosperity to the foundation. All had been well until these later days when there had developed in the Abbey a Fletcher faction, restive under the high-minded and strictly

religious rule of Abbot Thomas. This faction had dimly hoped for relief in the ascendency of Dean Fletcher's influence in the Abbey—the man much sinned against, his friends held, who would have been Abbot of Thornton but for the untoward influences which had pushed Thomas de Gretham into his place.

The door opened, and the Lady Heloise entered, looking fresh and beautiful. Abbot Thomas arose, alert and genial, and pressed into his *Benedicite* a wealth of feeling which that conventional greeting seldom bore, even on his lips.

He motioned Heloise to a vacant chair near the table. "Are you tardy this morning?" he asked playfully. Then he picked up a cat that rubbed against his gown, looked whimsically into its eyes, and said, "No! By sonties, timely! 'Twas my impatience made the time seem long!"

Heloise laughed at his good humor. "I came early purposely," she said, "in order that I might speak on a certain matter before the lesson. You know about the stolen will that's likely to turn us out of doors?"

"Aye! Aye! Have you caught the thief?"

"No! Bad fortune! All's dark. There is no clue. Both deed and he that took it have disappeared, apparently forever."

"Right sorry am I. When you spoke I thought you had the thief. Surely I would have helped you hang him!"

"Knew you that the parchment was drawn in

favor of the Abbey?" The Abbot nodded gravely. The implications involved were displeasing to him.

Heloise continued, "Both Scrivener and Guilbert de Rouen are sure the stolen parchment will end its adventures in the muniment room of the Abbey."

The Abbot shook his head. Very dubious was the whole matter to him. He had no light upon the subject.

"Is the will come to the Abbey, Abbot Thomas?"

The directness of the question startled the Abbot, and its possible implications visibly embarrassed him.

"No! No!" he replied vehemently. He paused, then added, in a hesitating tone, "Unless 'tis there, and I know it not."

Heloise questioned him with her eyes, and shortly he answered,—

"The Dean,—the Dean drew up the parchment, I understand. Mayhap he has an interest in having his work restored to a legal footing. He may have dickered for the stolen deed at the gate, and have it unknown to me. He's land poor and land hungry!"

The Abbot curbed his impatience lest it should hurry him too far. In a different vein he added, "If the deed appears in the Abbey, knowing it to be false as I do, I will hand it over to Sir William forthwith, with my apologies that so foul an implication should for a moment have rested upon the Abbey. Not a hair of your head will I harm. I

despise land greed, and all other varieties of lust for gain.—Let's to the lesson," continued the Abbot, opening the book that lay on the table, and turning to the place.

Beyond a doubt, the Abbot's tutorship of Heloise was a most delightful task. It was also full of uncharted peril for them both.

The Lady Heloise was no common woman. She was in the full bloom of compelling womanhood, and the impress of high-mindedness glorified her face. That she was totally unconscious of the witchery of her face and form, constituted a subtle element in the freshness and continual power of those feminine attractions. Not her face, but her keen, soulful intellect, was the master key of her character and the quality that made the tutor joy in his pupil, as well as the power that compelled Guilbert de Rouen to love the maid.

The Abbot and Heloise had long been companions in the conquest of the world of Schools and Schoolmen. Under the Abbot's directing hand Heloise had early spurned the conventional *Trivium* of the scholastic curriculum, dwelt awhile more fruitfully in the *Quadrivium* of the universities, then had passed with healthy zest into the stirring dialectics of the age, and she loved to cross swords with her tutor on the fascinating fields where Nominalism and Realism waged their interminable war.

The vital questionings of Heloise, as tutor and pupil traversed together medieval lore, had awakened Abbot Thomas to his best intellectual self.

Her eager nature made him long for the time when all mankind should be as wide awake as she. Unconsciously, by teaching her he was adding cubits to his own stature. He knew it not, but her intimate acquaintance with his mental life had put into her hands the key to his nature, and she was happily as ignorant as he of the power she wielded over him.

In innocence and in ignorance, so childlike and ingenuous were their natures, the life of the intellect had joined together the hearts of Abbot Thomas and Heloise. They were lovers, but they knew it not. The Abbot was fenced from love by his priestly vows, and his sincere religious life had prevented him from interpreting his growing delight in his pupil as the experience of that love from which his vows barred him. In Heloise, maidenly reverence for the church and the inbred subordination of the woman to the priest, which has given ritualism its hold on woman in all ages, made thought of love between her and the Abbot as far from her mind as the east is from the west.

So it had fallen out that for many months these two had actually experienced a high and pure love, without naming the passion or even dimly recognizing it in their lives. The nearest they had come to naming their happy relationship was when the Abbot, alone in his cell, would ascribe his bounding pulse and kindling eye, and the glad tide of life rising up within him, to his natural joy in the progress of a pupil of extraordinary promise.

In her bower Heloise had often attributed the new music in her life, and her growing interest in her teacher, to an orderly and lawful reverence for his saintly character, and an abounding joy in the intellectual world to which he daily introduced her. These characterizations were far enough from declarations of love, or even from the recognition of love, but nevertheless the experiences lured the pair on to dangerous and impossible ground.

The Abbot and his pupil had travelled far together, and this day their lesson was a black-letter page of an old chronicler who told the story of the dawn of intellect in the ancient days. Under the guidance of the old schoolman they had wandered over the pages of the theme now familiar to every one—the burying of the old Greek world—the inundation of the Roman world by barbarian hordes—the medieval church, mediator between the conquering barbarism and the conquered civilization, through whose monastic teachers the conquered in time overcame their conquerors. Their enthusiasm had been aroused by schools and names—Alcuin, and Paul the Deacon, with the group of scholars who manned the schools of Charlemagne—Berenger of Tours, and the great Anselm of Canterbury. These great protagonists lived again in the fruitful imagination of the monk and the maid.

Today they were busy with the story of the University of Paris, and the black-letter page Heloise was reading seemed actually illuminated

with the romance of Peter Abelard. The strong appeal of the story had roused the old chronicler to unwonted vigor, and the unsuspecting pair in the old oaken room, with the *Roman de la Rose* hung soft about them in the tapestry on the walls, were borne away with its human interest. With a voice thrilled by the story, Heloise read to her tutor from the romantic and tragic climax of Abelard's career:

"And so Abelard, priest and scholar, became her teacher, and under his skill the maid awoke to the great world. They had not travelled far together before they were mutually surprised to discover Cupid laughing at them from among the manuscripts, and they must needs both laugh back. Then did they both begin to live when they began to love. And, notwithstanding that it was contrary to the canons, Abelard knew that the life of love he lived was the true fulfillment of his nature, and that priestly celibacy was but as the traditions of the elders spoken of in the gospels,—an invention of prelates and priests. So he boldly went on and carried her with him, and they were happy because they had abandoned themselves to love, and in their glad eyes all the world seemed to wish them joy. At length their great love led them to the altar in Notre Dame early in the morning. And Heloise,—"

At the mention of her own name on this page of ancient romance, a deep consciousness flashed in upon the reader, and the sentence finished itself

with lengthening hyphens, as she picked it slowly from the book, appropriating its suggestions to herself as she read— — "was wedded to-a-priest, and scorned—the—scornful world—in—the—triumph—of her———w-o-m-a-n'-s———l-o-v-e."

Her face flamed scarlet, her eyelashes rested on her cheeks. The book slipped from her hand into her lap, then slid unnoticed to the floor. The strange paragraph had surprised her into a recognition of a relationship she had long enjoyed but of which she had never been conscious. It was as though she stood before a mirror and feared to look upon what she saw.

A strange exultation surged in the Abbot's heart. Fear and joy strove within for mastery. But when a wild gladness would have hurried him into action, the memory of his priestly vows stole across his mind. Strange to say, holy as were the vows and the memory of them, they came to him now like the villain in the play, holding the situation, but casting gloom over the stage. 'Twas but a minute. Then he leaned over the table between them, and with his face close to hers, broke out slowly, tenderly, persuasively, yet, withal, passionately, "Save for his greater learning, I am Abelard, and you are truly Heloise. 'Tis a true story we have read, and one of ourselves."

It was a full minute before she could answer, and then she spoke slowly, hesitatingly, as though she dreamed:

"Nay, but I am not Heloise. Not worthy am

I to touch her shoes. She was beautiful, and a scholar, a woman of great mind. But indeed you are Abelard,"—and her face lighted up—"and shall do better than he in the great world. For he made shipwreck foolishly."

In the silence that ensued, the Abbot mused unto himself, "And this is love! What fools we monks be! Why, the world was made for love." And she could but hear, for when two souls are a-tune the very silences speak through and for them both.

She answered, low and sweet, but strongly, as though she were the elder, and had somehow become his superior. "Abbot Thomas, remember your sacred vows. You are consecrated to the holiest office. A long line of honors wait for you, so you are faithful to the end."

He answered her passionately, speaking promptly, from the heart and not from the head. "What of me was consecrated but life? To whom was my life consecrated but unto Him who created and who loves life? For what was this consecration, but to bless and beautify life, and what is life but love? God himself, saith the scripture, is love. We will love. We do love! None can prevent us!" he cried, springing to his feet and standing before her, as one preferring a petition on which depends his very life.

Then, his own teaching turned to plague him. Standing now by his side, Heloise put her hand firmly upon his shoulder. Looking earnestly into

his very soul, her voice tremulous and rich with a new tenderness, she said, "Nay, good Father, you know that what is must be right. The church proclaims against love and marriage among her priests. The canons have consecrated celibacy. Love is right for an ordinary man, but it must be wrong for a priest, or the church would not have disallowed it."

But the while she spoke, her eyes and face belied the brave words upon her lips, and gave him encouragement she did not intend. He rejoined, passionately, beseechingly, his soul aflame: "Priest and man! Forsooth! Is there then a difference? Is not a priest a man? Because he consecrates himself to the service of his fellows, does he therefore sacrifice his manhood? Nay, but I will be a man, and a priest at the same time. True love will help me to teach, preach, govern, and serve the world,—a world of love of which we two will be a wedded part. That surely is God's way. We will not try to improve God's plan, canon or no canon, church or no church, Abbey or no Abbey, Pope or no Pope."

"But, see you, now! You will end by becoming a Wyclifite!" she cried, clasping her hands together nervously.

"Nay, I may not be a heretic," the Abbot answered dolefully, but still in such manner as to indicate that this, 'Thus far shalt thou go,' demarked a very shadowy boundary, and one which might be passed were the occasion sufficient. Then he continued, "But you love me, Heloise!

I know you do; and I love you! We have loved all along, and knew it not! We have been blind. But now we see, and we love. Why should we not wed, and live the happy life?"

With averted face she evaded his direct question, and cast about her for an avenue of escape, but with a hope lurking within her consciousness that she might be unable to find one. Then, summoning reserve strength and conviction, and turning to him she exclaimed passionately. "Bethink thee! O! bethink thee! Bethink thee, Father Thomas, Abbot of St. Mary's."

"Bethink me! Yes, I will bethink me!" he broke out, "Why look you! Here in the Book Wyclif is broadcasting over the land is the story of the olden church, on which our church is patterned. See! Adam surely wed! Noah's family are all there! Jacob loved Rachel, and for her served seven long years. The prophets' wives are mentioned, and their children, Peter's wife's mother the good Lord healed of a fever, and Peter is the veritable father of our Popes! The Blessed Mary was wedded to a husband, and there be some who say she bare her husband children, who played on the streets with the Holy Child—about which mystery I trow not. But surely the Patriarchs and Priests and Prophets of the olden church were not debarred marriage. Why should we be less free than they? Now, by our Blessed Lady, you and I love, and we will not be bound by traditions so we may not wed."

Then he fell into a muse, and remembered the solemn day of his consecration, and doubt clouded his mind, and he was uncertain, trembling within, afraid of the new ground upon which he stood. Heloise sat again in the chair, and her fingers turned mechanically to the page where she had read the startling paragraph. Her eye fell upon another paragraph, and, as by an inspiration she broke in upon the Abbot's musings with the continuation of the old chronicler's story:

"Then the cruel world closed about the innovator, and pelted him with scorn, for he had fallen away from grace, and men tumbled him from the pedestal into the very mud of obloquy and disgrace. And, because he was but a weak man, and his vanity was stronger than his love, Abelard was driven to deny his marriage. Heloise, because she loved him supremely and far beyond his understanding of it, applauded him in his denial, though it made of her but a courtezan in the eyes of the gaping crowd. But she would not let her love for him, nor his for her, stand in the way of his preferment in ecclesiastical honors, or hinder or diminish the dialectic victories which his soul so much loved, and upon which his great fame had been built.

"Then, though they both still loved, they separated during their tarrying in this mortal world. She took the veil, and for her he built the Paraclete, of which she became the Abbess for many, many years. Abelard went his way into the great world of

monks, and bishops, and clerks, and scholars, and they for the most part scorned him because he had been so weak as to break his priestly vow to take the marriage vow, and then had broken the marriage vow because he was afraid.

"At length Abelard died, and, because the old love was still fresh in the Abbess' heart, she brought his poor body from afar, and laid it to rest before the altar in her own Abbey church. When the time came for her to die, she ordered that her body should lie beside that of her husband. And this they did—"

The Abbot put forth his hand to stop her reading. But the old chronicler's story had gathered her womanly strength into a great resolution.

She stopped his words with her own:—"My Lord, the Abbot"—and her formal address struck chill to his heart—"for the joy of earthly love I will not drag you down as the Heloise of long ago dragged down the fame of the man she loved. On you, honor, position, power, loudly call. You may be in the church just what you will. Between worthy honors and you will I not stand—I am unworthy to stand. May we not love unwed? We have loved unwed! We can continue what we have enjoyed, and save both love and honor." She came up to him, and put both her hands caressingly upon his shoulders, and spoke her very soul into his soul. "This paradise we have just discovered has unwittingly long been ours. Let the old relationship stand. Go on with your great work. We

will both love, and both live, and neither shall suffer loss."

"Nay," the Abbot exclaimed. "Let's marry and away. I'll forswear priestly consecration for a higher. Be my wedded wife. Wilt?"

"The wife of the Abbot of St. Mary's! How 'twould sound!" Proud scorn had come into her voice, but her heart faltered, and he caught her in his arms, and kissed her. And as she kissed him, her head sank upon his shoulder, as though that were to be its pillow forever. He led her to a couch where they might sit side by side; and as he seated her they stole the magic of another kiss, and still another, as they nestled together in a new, glad, strange world.

At that moment, for so the fates would have it, Dean Fletcher sauntered by the open casement. A supercilious smile played upon his countenance, though he appeared not to see them. The twain upon the couch knew not that that shadow had rested upon them.

CHAPTER VII.
THE FEAST OF DEDICATION

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IN WHICH THE AUSTIN CANONS RE-DEDICATE THEIR CHURCH WITH STATELY CEREMONY, AND A VOICE OUT OF MYSTERY UTTERS AN ORACLE NOT HARD TO UNDERSTAND

Following the identification of his reciprocated passion for Heloise, Abbot Thomas was a new man, and dwelt strangely, yet withal securely, in a new world. Heloise had laid her clear firm will upon him. They would love,—he would remain a monk, she a maid. The new romance filled his life with pure, lofty sentiment. Moreover, love made pleasant the daily strife between the old priestly ideals and the new sentiments that governed his lover's life. His tutorship at the Manor House became a paradise. He knew himself to be a pioneer. None had travelled that way before. There was no beaten track. But he felt himself strong enough to live on this strange frontier, to be at home in both camps, to owe equal allegiance to the two interests which the world about him held to be mutually conflicting, to be able to serve God with a clear conscience, both as an Abbot and as a lover. Though he felt the slipperiness of the ground, and was promptly aware that an inkling of his new position was abroad in the Abbey,

(poisoned arrows, as he well knew, in his enemies' quiver) his new passion made him both a better man and a better Abbot.

The day before the dedication, the Manor House, the Abbey, and the village overflowed with guests. White Canons came from Newhouse, and russet Benedictines from a dozen houses over the country. The mitered Abbot of Crowland, accompanied by a gorgeous suite, rode in from the South, and my Lord the Bishop of Lincoln arrived in time for dinner, with a retinue large enough and gay enough to have been the escort of a prince of the blood. Knights, and squires, and highborn dames from afar trooped in with the rest, till Thornton looked like a fresh piece of tapestry spread over the country side. The purple and the blue, the red, the yellow, and the green, the black, the white, and the grey of monks' cossacks, hoods, and birettas, mingled on the Abbey garth. From beneath brilliant jupons and gay sur-coats glimpsed the armor of many a noble knight, and youthful squires gloried in flowery rainbow-hued vestments. Fine ladies rustled through the crowd in silk and satin kirtles and wimpled hoods, the while they laughed and talked and held court together.

Right royally did Abbot Thomas entertain his guests. How busy the cooks were! The neighboring marshes contributed wild waterfowl. Obedient to cooks' orders, fat capons followed plump pullets into big ovens, where they browned together amid a little sea of common gravy. From the green-

wood came pheasants, partridges, and rabbits, in multiplied braces. The thoughtless cooks robbed the sky of larks, that the feast might be truly epicurean. Lincoln green brought in good Saxon deer, and cooks with French names transformed them into savory venison. Sucking pigs herded with prime English beef and legs of wold-fed mutton, until, at the clangor of the dinner bell, the result of all this culinary art came together in grand ensemble. In half a dozen courses, washed down with ancient wine, this princely fare passed in grand review adown the groaning tables, between laughing rows of hungry men—the Abbot himself presiding at the head of the table, Dean Fletcher serving viands from the foot.

No shadow was yet on the dial, the morning of the dedication when Abbot Thomas rang the bell in his bedroom, and then finished buttoning his gaiters. Presently he bade come in some one who knocked, and Dean Fletcher entered, smiling, rubbing his hands, evidently well satisfied with the world.

"Good morn, Brother Richard," the Abbot said cheerily. "Do you promise us a fine day?"

"Aye, a fine day above, and in the Abbey. The house is full of honored guests, and the dedication promises to be according to the rubric."

"You have everything in readiness."

"Everything is foreseen and duly arranged."

The Abbot looked with approval upon the Dean, whose masterful competence was after his own

heart. "You rise early. How long have you been up?" he asked.

The Dean eyed the Abbot narrowly a moment. A close observer might have seen a cunning look flash over his face. He seemed to take the Abbot's measure. In a moment he answered lightly, "Not a pillow have I seen this night. Too much was to be done."

"Truly you do serve the Abbey well. I thank you, Richard."

"Will you have me wake the Bishop?" queried the Dean.

"Not yet awhile. He rode hard yesterday. Let him sleep another hour."

When the Dean turned to go, the Abbot added, casually, "By the by, Richard, rumor has it that the stolen deed to the Manor lands is in the Abbey. Know you aught about it?"

The question surprised the Dean, but only for an instant did his face show it. He turned slowly toward the Abbot, and his face wore its wonted inscrutable expression. His tongue shot across his thin lips. "No! Abbot Thomas! I know naught of it? Lincoln's too far away, and I'm not Sheriff. But this I do know, that the deed ought to be in our muniment room, and we ought to have been profiting by the Manor lands these many years."

His hard metallic voice portended storm, and the Abbot, though surprised at the outbreak, sought to soothe him.

"Nay! Nay! Richard," he said genially. "No need for feeling, nor for hard words. Right's right. Surely the later deed should hold—will hold in law. I mean the one the green thief burned, as they say. Let us not lay claim to land based on bare theft. That were to lose our good name. We must be just to others, before we dare be selfish for ourselves."

The Dean was implacably irate. The soft words exasperated him, perhaps because he mistook them for weakness. Pent anger surged into his face, and a sneer was in his voice when he answered, "That sounds like foolish John Wyclif. We'll all be his Poor Priests if you have your way, our treasure, land, and gold scattered, and with neither will nor ability to get more. Beshrew me, but I hate such cant! The Manor lands should be ours. 'Twas I drew up the deed, saw it signed and duly witnessed. No later deed have I seen, nor has anyone else that I know of! I tell you, if I ever get hold of the Manor deed, we'll hold the acres. The Brotherhood's against you, Abbot Thomas! You're too soft, too religious by far! These be bold words, I trow, but mine oath bids me speak the truth."

The Abbot was visibly moved. A weaker man might have been angered, but when he spoke he had himself well in hand. He arose and put his hand gently on the Dean's shoulder.

"Speak not hot, foolish words, Dean Fletcher. If you will not heed abstract justice, think of it in

the concrete. 'Twould be fire and sword for our good neighbor, Sir William."

The Dean laughed, a nasty, biting, sarcastic laugh, barbed with an insinuating sneer.

"Scripture saith, 'Arise, Peter, kill and eat.' I'm in favor of Holy Writ," he answered dryly.

"But think of Sir William, and his," pleaded the Abbot, kindly, but firmly, feeling the justice on his side.

"His?" flamed the Dean. "Mayhap 'twere truer had you said, 'Her!' By sonties, Abbot Thomas, the Abbey begins to think that you're too thick at the Manor House, and that the Lady Heloise may be your Eve! Your protest 'gainst our title to their lands half looks that way!"

The Dean opened the door, swept out mightily into the corridor, and slammed the door after him. Abbot Thomas smiled at this petty exhibition of anger. Then he bit his lip, took a turn or two about the room to win mastery over himself, and then leaned back upon the edge of the table, meditative. "He's full of strange turns," he mused. "Sometimes he's good, sometimes very bad. Not all the mud in his making was breathed human! Greed and Ambition damn him a petty soul, and will be the ruin of him yet, in spite of his Austin habit."

Then the figure of Heloise floated across his vision, color mounted his face, and he shuddered. Mayhap his own Austin habit might not save him from shipwreck.

" 'Tis a most difficult pass!" he mused. "The Dean may yet hold the whip! But, bah! 'Tis all very small onions." And the Abbot went about his preparations for the dedication.

When the great bell sounded tierce, Abbot Thomas, in full canonicals, led the Austin Canons into the chancel of the church. The monks filled every stall, and looked down upon nave and transept crowded with people. So thick did the congregation stand, that the vergers could with difficulty maintain the necessary aisle through the throng. Curiously enough, the Abbot's eyes quickly discovered Heloise, though she was surrounded by the multitude and all but hidden from his view by a pillar. By her side stood Guilbert de Rouen, protecting her from the crowd as best he could. The sight of Heloise brought a flush to the Abbot's cheek and quickened his pulse. Strange, and even reprehensible as it doubtless appears, and outrageous as, without doubt, was its intrusion upon the high sanctities of this hour, the illicit in his relationship with Heloise tingled in the Abbot's blood. From his place among his unsuspecting brethren, he saw visions and dreamed dreams, heard music foreign to the rubrics, and also most marvelously sweet.

There came a loud knocking at the west door of the church, as though a knight were beating the ponderous door with the butt of his lance, demanding the surrender of whomever might be within. With the ordered stateliness of the old Roman

church, with which that institution has pleased the eye through long centuries in matters of ritual, where the English Church is but a weak imitator, Abbot Thomas and Dean Fletcher led the Thornton canons down through the congregation. At the door the Abbot cried with a loud voice, "Who knocks at the door of the Abbey church of St. Mary's at Thornton? What may be your business?"

The rapping repeated itself, rattling the heavy oaken door.

"Who knocks? Who stands without? Why disturb you the peace of the Brotherhood of St. Mary's? Answer, there, without," cried the Abbot. The people strained their necks and stood tip-toe to see what would happen.

Again the knocking, more imperative than before, followed immediately by an answer from without, muffled by the closed door. "Open! Open! in the name of the lord Bishop of Lincoln."

"Brother Fletcher, may we ope the door? Has he right to enter?" queried the Abbot of the Dean at his side.

"I think we may. We will grant him only ceremonial right," answered the Dean.

"Well!" At the word Dean Fletcher took a ponderous key from his girdle, and with it unlocked the door, using and needing both his hands.

He threw open the door, and the whole space between the west front of the church and the east front of the new Gate House presented itself to view

packed with a waiting glittering throng. There stood my lord the Bishop of Lincoln, gorgeously robed, mitered and jeweled, the pastoral crook in his hand glittering with gold and precious stones, and gay with fluttering ribbons. All about him stood his numerous retinue, scarcely less royally attired than he. Behind and about the ecclesiastics the villiens, russet clad and lean with hunger, craned their necks to catch what sight they could of plump faces and dazzling robes, dreaming the while behind their stolid faces of the day of vengeance sure to come when the people should rise.

The Bishop's banner swung through the open door, followed by taperers, thurifers, and a long double line of ecclesiastics. When he was barely within the door the Bishop broke out into the ancient psalm, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," intoning in a clear round voice. The whole body of the foreign priests, together with the Thornton Canons, made the church echo with the antiphone, "The world and they that dwell therein." At the threshold of the sanctuary the psalm ended, and the monks divided to the gospel and the epistle sides, filling the choir stalls to overflowing, so that the Abbot and his immediate staff could scarcely find places to stand, and the Thornton monks were glad to find even standing-room in the Chapter House, where they could but dimly hear and could not see at all.

The Abbot of Crowland preached the sermon. He was in the midst of a passage which itself illus-

trated its theme,—the weakness and weariness of the flesh,—when a great clatter in the choir almost convulsed Abbot Thomas, who sat on a lower throne by the Bishop. Indeed, laughter was everywhere and would not be smothered, for Dean Fletcher, perched on his *misericorde* seat had fallen asleep, as was very evident. Designed to trap such slumberers, the seat had pitched forward on its hinges, throwing the Dean violently upon the floor in front of the stalls. Even the Bishop joined in the contagious merriment. The Dean ruefully picked himself up, and resumed his seat. The old Adam in him flushed angrily as he looked straight before him at nothing, in a painfully conscious effort to appear unconscious. The laughter which would play about the corners of Abbot Thomas' mouth and dance in the Bishop's eyes, in spite of all they could do to suppress it, did not tend to soothe the Dean's wounded pride. He moistened his lips with his tongue, and leaned back sulkily in his seat. Doubtless much midnight vigil and prayer lay at the bottom of his misfortune, as he later took care to explain. Human nature can only stand so much, and the Abbot was undoubtedly right in lightening the rigors of the Dean's life by the remission of some of the more untimely of these duties. Even a monk must sleep sometimes.

While the last strains of St. Ambrose's noble anthem, the *Te Deum*,—the most used and most abused of all the ancient hymns—were dying

away, the dignitaries arose for the Recessional. Amid the bustle attending the movement, just as the Bishop, with Abbot Thomas and Dean Fletcher on either hand, was descending the throne, and the monks were watching for their places, the church suddenly filled with a Voice. High above all other sounds it rang out, clear and strong, attracting attention to itself by its peculiar and almost spiritual quality, almost as much as by its unusualness in such a place or by the weird burden of its message. Men looked everywhere for the source of the Voice, but found it not. But the Voice that could not be located penetrated every nook of the church. Everybody heard, held his breath, and wondered.

"Aye! Aye! Aye!" cried the Voice. "Another gay procession! Fall into line, fine soldiers of the cross! Now, hear, ye children of Sodom, give ear ye people of Gomorrah to the voice of the Lord. You preach poverty,—the few of you who can preach—and scornfully you live in luxury. Chastity is on your tongues and concubines in your beds. Drunkards you are, who preach poor people temperance. Heaven is your theme and the blessed saints, and lo! ye are but grovellings of the earth."

The people were thunderstruck. The manifest truth of the words and the mystery of the Voice held them spellbound. The monks swarmed about the chancel like angry bees. They looked into each others' faces awed and helpless. The Bishop unconsciously resumed his seat, clutching the arms of

his throne nervously. His face blanched, yet his eye flashed fire, fear and courage, neck and neck, contending within him to the point of action.

Abbot Thomas sprang to the altar steps, whence he overlooked the seething multitude, but vainly sought the source of the mysterious Voice. He would have spoken a command, but he remembered Heloise, and was silent. Conscience smote many another monk, and the smitten hung their heads. Others, equally conscience-stricken held their heads high in the air, simulating scorn. Some were so encased in evil that even the Voice touched naught within them; while a few, pure in heart, knew how true the message was, and trembled for their brethren.

A brazen inspiration seized the monk who had borne the crucifix in the processional. High upon its staff he lifted the sacred symbol, as though to stay the plague of scalding words, or to shield himself and his brethren from the blasting truth. The act but stirred the Voice afresh.

"Well may you lift the Redeemer on his cross, traitors and free livers all! He was crucified for you, and every day you crucify him more! Once was he kissed in betrayal,—only once,—but you betray him with your kisses times beyond count, and dare not hang yourselves, though hang you ought! Aye! Cross yourselves, traitor monks, but little good will it do you!"

It added a dash of horror that the Voice which nobody could see, could evidently see everybody

and also noted everything. Dean Fletcher was beside himself with rage.

"He was a poor man," the Voice continued. "He loved villeins, companying with them. But you, forsooth, are great nobles, and oppress God's poor. You sacrifice men to your greed and women to your lust, devour widows' store, and herd with the rich. You steal! You steal! You steal your neighbor's land!"

Heloise turned to Guilbert de Rouen. "Sonties! 'Tis somebody who knows!" exclaimed Guilbert, and his eye sought in vain for the source of the Voice. Dean Fletcher dashed into the throng on the same fruitless quest, clutching his nails into his hands. But the Voice did not halt.

"Out with you, false knaves, traitors to the cross you carry! Destruction waiteth for you, and you shall not escape. Your houses shall be consumed with fire, your harlots scattered, the sites of your churches plowed, and you yourselves, O haughty men of shame, shall swing on gallows high as Haman's. Your portion shall be the flames of Hell, and the damnation of the Pit, for—the—mouth—of—the—Lord———hath——spoken——it. Doom! Doom! Doom!"——

The awful Voice faded away and left an appalling silence.

The Recessional never formed. Helter-skelter the congregation left the church. Monks and dignitaries stood not upon the order of their reaching the Chapter House, where they disrobed in garru-

lous confusion. Some unauthorized person blew out the lights on the altar, and a villein who lingered in the church chuckled openly, as though his dull brain perceived the act to be symbolic.

CHAPTER VIII. THE DWARF

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THE DWARF

IN WHICH GREEK MEETS GREEK IN A BATTLE OF WITS, AND THE MAN WHO WINS SUFFERS NOTABLE DEFEAT

On an autumn evening, the Dwarf stood in the center of a group of monks by the fountain on the Abbey garth. As the guest of St. John,—the gentle, kindly, scholarly St. John, who haunted the Scriptorium, but who, nevertheless, found relaxation in the companionship of the Dwarf—he had just eaten supper with the brethren in the refectory. Supper ended, it would seem that the Dwarf was paying for his meal by inciting the brotherhood to merriment. Laughter echoed among the buildings. The Dwarf was in his drollest mood. It would have been dark but for the torches planted by the fountain, and but for occasional other torches which sputtered in their rings at the angles of the buildings bounding the garth, dividing the enclosure into flickering streaks of dim yellow light and shadows numerous and heavy.

When the fun was at high tide, Dean Fletcher came out of the refectory in company with Brothers Geoffrey and Benedict. The newcomers stood on the edge of the crowd awhile and presently laughed

as heartily as the rest,—the impish lout was so cleverly droll, his antics so ludicrous, that even the dignity of a Dean must needs unbend. Shortly the Dean sauntered toward his house across the garth, conversing with his companions. Compline sounded from the tower. By twos and threes, the monks drifted into the church, bidding good-night to the Dwarf, who was left alone by the fountain.

Securely hidden by a shadow, the Dwarf watched the movements of the Dean, whom he saw enter the house with his companions. The door closed after them. Presently a light, newly created and glimmering through a certain lattice, told the watcher that the trio had arrived in the Dean's bedroom. Swiftly and silently, the Dwarf skirted the path toward the Dean's house, stepping in the shadows and avoiding the streaks of yellow light, his foot light, stealthy, sure, like some forest-kind tracking its prey. By the Dean's house, he climbed a tree that overhung the masonry. He might have been an ape, so easily did he climb, and so at home was he among the branches, though it was so dark in the tree that he had to feel his way. He pushed out along a limb that swept close to the wall. At a certain place, which evidently was foreknown to him, he rested his shoulders back in the fork of a neighboring branch. Then he gently and cautiously pushed aside the mass of ivy in front of him, and through a crack in the masonry, forced open by a large ivy root, he could see down into the Dean's bedroom.

The three monks were plainly in sight, as they sat closely about a table. The dwarf smothered a faint grunt of satisfaction when he saw that the monks scrutinized a black letter parchment that lay between them on the table. The Dwarf pressed his face into the ivy close to the wall to look and listen, his body tense with excitement.

"'Twas no longer safe in the muniment room. The Abbot's growing suspicious. He's likely to take a fancy to look over the parchments himself, to see if we have the will Green Devil stole," he heard the Dean say.

The Dwarf could not clearly distinguish all the monks said, but he gathered that it was the stolen deed that lay on the table before them; that they would hold it, in spite of the Abbot, till they could make it win the Manor lands; that something might happen to make that day not so far away; that by and by the Dean himself might be Abbot, when all would be well for the Abbey and ill for Sir William Wellham. The Dwarf ground his teeth and dented his finger-nails into his palms when he caught coarse jests about the Lady Heloise and the Abbot; especially when brother Benedict averred that the new Abbot that was to be ought to inherit the old Abbot's harem. Guilbert de Rouen, fine bird though he appeared, was no match for a monk's frock, the men said. Meanwhile the safest place for the deed was the Dean's bedroom. From his place of espial the Dwarf saw the Dean fold the precious document, and with a theatrical

air impress a kiss upon it, as though it were a relic of a saint, and tuck it away securely beneath the pillow of his bed. Then the Dean produced a pack of playing cards, so handsomely illuminated that they must have cost half a king's ransom, (unless St. John had illuminated them for the Abbey) and the trio entered into a social game.

The Dwarf swung himself lightly to the ground. Presently he stood before Dean's door and rained upon it a dozen blows with his fist. When the door opened the Dwarf was not there, having stepped into the friendly shadow of a buttress, from which a moment later he took a spectacular handspring past the astonished Geoffrey into the room!

"Take a hand!" importuned brother Benedict. "We'll skin the Dean and Geoffrey, and stretch their hides on the church door to dry!"

The Dwarf eyed him a moment with droll quizzery. Then the three fell to laughing—the clown's face was so provoking.

"I'm ticklishly particular," drawled the Dwarf. "Your reputation's a little soiled!" The laughter passed beyond control.

The Dwarf stuck his arms a-kimbo and looked at the Dean.

"Can you stick out your tongue and touch your ear?" he asked. Falling into his rollicking humor, the Dean tried, and failed! Long as was his tongue and wide as was his mouth, a wide strip of tawny cheek showed between the tip of his tongue and his ear! With a countenance as solemn as the moon-



In the Dean's Chamber—"Can you stick out your tougue and touch your ear."

light visage of a church owl, the Dwarf stuck out his tongue full length, as though he mistook the Dean for a leech, and at the same time he touched his ear with the tip of his finger! Imperturbable as the Sphinx, the Dwarf looked solemnly on at the laughter that convulsed the three men.

"You droll devil," cried the Dean, between spasms, "you'll be the solemn death of us all!"

"I hope so!" exclaimed the Dwarf. "Till then, lend me a farthing. I'm pauper, and going worse."

The Dean handed him the coin, and, in sight of them all, the Dwarf took from the Dean's hand a golden florin!

"Saint Satan!" exclaimed the Dean, and Geoffrey and Benedict cried together, greatly excited, "Let me see! Let me see!"

Forthwith, the Dwarf handed the gold piece to Benedict, but when that worthy held the precious coin to the candle, lo! it was but the Dean's paltry farthing! Chagrined, Benedict gave the farthing back to the Dwarf, who, before their very eyes, took from his hand a golden *mark!* Such necromancy! The Dean's eyes glittered green.

"Give me back my farthing," he cried. Promptly the Dwarf handed him the golden mark. The Dean clutched the coin, glanced an instant at it through his closed fingers, and, in high disgust, thrust his original farthing into his pocket!

"It's weird, uncanny," cried the Dean. "Part of the Black Art. You'll hang. O, you'll hang!"

"With you; good company!" scoffed the Dwarf,

quickly, coolly, humorously. " 'Tis the way to make metal breed. Get your hands out of your pockets, men! Can't make money with your hands in your pockets! Put your hands into somebody's else pockets! Stick 'em in deep and often, and grab,—that's the latest creed and the best!"

Then the Dwarf took a chair between the table and the bed, and fell into exquisite mimicry. He bent over the table in serious mood, an earnest wholesome look upon his face, his right hand thumb and finger posed as though they drove a quill; and the trio cried in unison,—"St. John, by sonties! St. John!"

One by one the Dwarf pantomimed the chief characters in the Abbey, to his auditors' huge delight. He ended with the Dean himself. To set forth the Dean he arose to his feet, walked the floor back and forth the length of the bed, his eyes on the ground, his hands clasped behind his back, meditating, with a fine religious air. When the tip of his tongue moistened his parched lips time and again, the trio roared, and roared again with laughter. No king's court ever had a droller clown!

The Dwarf fell upon the bed, leaning an elbow on the pillow, and began a salacious tale from Boccaccio, and the monks smacked their lips with enjoyment. Little St. Hugh of Lincoln followed hard on Boccaccio's gay nuns and monks, with no incongruity felt either by him who yarned or by them who listened. Verse by verse in fine style, the Dwarf recited the ballad, piling mystery on

mystery, and the medieval romance held the monks almost as well as the Italian's tale. When the Dwarf concluded—

"And a' the bells o' merry Lincoln
Without men's hands were rung,
And a' the books o' merry Lincoln
Were read without man's tongue,
And ne'er was such a burial
Since Adam's days begun"——

the trio clapped their hands. After a brief pause, still seated on the Dean's bed, the Dwarf remarked,

"I saw 'em duck the witch yesterday, at Keelby."

"Tell us!" cried Geoffrey and Benedict.

But the Dean said, "You'd better let witches alone. They'll get you into bushels o' trouble."

"I did let her alone!" the Dwarf answered. " 'Twas the crowd rough-handled her! O, she's a hussy! Such a voice, and a face round as a turnip!" The Dwarf laughed at the recollection of the jolly, round, plump face of the Keelby witch.

"The mob had her, but I trow she had the mob by the ear with her shrewish tongue. 'Come here you young jacknapes,' she would cry whenever she caught sight of a lad in the crowd. 'I'll cut a slit in your ear and stick your nose through it!' They hustled her to caddle beck. The water there is deep, and cold, and wet! How she did squirm when they bound her to the stool! But they ducked her!"

The Dwarf laughed heartily, and two monks laughed with him. The Dean seemed to enjoy

the story but indifferently, which was so unlike him.

"She came up spluttering fine, doubling her fists, swearing like a score or more of troopers! You could hear her across a ten-acre field.

" 'Hold her under longer, Tom, next time,' cried the parish priest. Tom did! He did! Oh, my goodness! The saints bless us! When she came up I thought she was done for! But, pshaw! you can't drown a real witch, and she is the worst in the country side. She shook the water from her like a spaniel, and fell to swearing again. You should hear her swear! She does it better than anybody I ever heard, in court or camp, or wearing monk's frock! Such hot words I never heard! All the fiends of hell she named, calling them up one by one, and as she called they came up through the grass! You could see them with your bodily eye, you could!"

The Dwarf crossed himself, and Geoffrey and Benedict followed suit. The Dean held himself sober and aloof, scowling at the fun.

"I tell you, it was better than a miracle play," the Dwarf continued. "She named the full ingredients of the witches' cauldron, till you could hear the foul pot bubble just beneath the thin sod! Every anathema men ever heard, and a full score of new ones, the witch hurled at that Keelby crowd, so that they fell back, cowed, shivering, afraid. Tom fell back with the rest, and when he let go the teeter-board the witch went under again!"

The Dwarf lay back on the bed writhing with laughter. "'Tis time all honest folk were abed," said the Dean, severely. Picking himself up from the bed and smothering his laughter, the Dwarf would have finished his story. But, acting on the Dean's hint, brothers Geoffrey and Benedict were already preparing to leave, so the Dwarf bade the Dean a hearty good night, and went out with them.

The Dwarf and the monks circled the garth to the Dormitory, where the monks bade the funny fellow good night and went in to bed. The Dwarf would go to bed, too. He made directly for the new Gate House. On the edge of a slit of light cast by a torch he halted a moment, and drew from his bosom the Manor House parchment which, under the cover of the witch story, he had filched from under the Dean's pillow. He examined it but a moment, as though to assure himself, then thrust it back into his bosom, and walked toward the Gate House with quickened and exultant step. He would see which would hold the Manor lands—the Dean or his own good master, Sir William!

At the Gate House the Dwarf found the postern door swinging on its hinges. The archway leading to the drawbridge was as dark as a hedge. But the Dwarf did not hesitate. He was so familiar with every nook and corner, that he stepped through the postern into the dark passage as firmly as though it had been broad daylight, nor did he slacken his pace. He was happy and buoyant, for was not the stolen deed in his bosom, and would

not his cunning exploit set at rest Sir William's fears? He enjoyed his mastership of the situation. He had whistled the first measure of a gay alehouse ditty, when, suddenly, without a word or other sound of warning, a heavy blow felled him to the ground.

Instantly he sprang to his feet, as though he were a bounding ball, and his upraised arms parried blows rained upon him by a quarterstaff in the hands of some strong, masterful, invisible foe. Not a word was spoken on either side. The Dwarf closed with his antagonist, and the quarterstaff fell on the pavement. Together the two men wrestled to the ground in deadly clutch, the Dwarf feeling for his antagonist's throat, pinioning his arms the while, that no dagger might come into play, the animal in him strong and furious. They wrestled in the dark up and down the archway, and contact with the man's body told the Dwarf that his antagonist wore a monk's gown. The men surged towards the postern. At the edge of the dim light at the postern his adversary broke away, by a masterly trick, the use of which surprised the Dwarf. Moreover, his antagonist fled! In the dim light of the torches about the garth the Dwarf could distinguish a tall wiry figure in the habit of a monk, running towards the Dean's house. Something familiar about the figure greatly surprised the Dwarf.

"Is it Dean Fletcher? It can't be the Dean! By sonties! It looks like him!" exclaimed the

Dwarf under breath. Then a sickly shamed feeling of defeat, of having been tricked, duped out of his victory, flushed hotly over him. He thrust his hand into his bosom. His smock was ripped and torn wide open! The parchment was gone!

The Dwarf swore softly a string of strange oaths, and then slowly turned on his heel to leave the Abbey. Fortunately the bridge was down, the watchman being either absent or asleep, and over the bridge the Dwarf passed unmolested, and apparently unobserved, into the woodsy Thornton road.

"If 'twas not the Dean, the Dean's at the bottom of it," he muttered to himself, a crescendo of anger rising within him. "The crafty, crafty dog! But, I'll get him, and also will I get the will! 'Tis my next move!"

A sort of wild frenzy came over him. He seized a fallen log that lay by the road, which hardly half a dozen men could lift. Hugging the knurly bulk in his arms, he bore it across the road half a dozen times, and lightly tossed it from him into the thicket. Had his antagonist witnessed that exhibition of brute strength, he would surely have thanked his lucky star that he had broken from the clinch before the frenzy had come upon the Dwarf.

CHAPTER IX.
A SCOURGE OF TONGUES

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IN WHICH A JUICY MORSEL UNDER THE TONGUE OF THE THORNTON CANONS LENDS COLOR TO THAT WRIT WHICH AVERS THAT THE TONGUE IS A WORLD OF INIQUITY SET ON FIRE OF HELL

The great bell in the Abbey tower tolled for nocturnes. Brother Paul turned over on his narrow bed, and would to sleep again, the hour was so very early. But the clang of the bell was insistent. At length, because the spirit was willing although the flesh was weak, the monk sat up, slowly swung his feet to the floor, and rubbed open his eyes. When, a minute later, a footfall passed down the corridor, halting before the door of each cell long enough to turn the key and call the sleeper to service, Brother Paul answered "Here" to the signal intended for him. Albeit, he yawned and stretched himself many times before he had dressed himself, or the spirit of sleep had fully departed from him. Then he stepped into the corridor with a sleepy, "Good morn," to Brother Thomas, whose cell was next to his. They twain fell into line with some threescore pairs of monks who by this time had gathered, and the brethren of St. Mary's, led by the Dean, moved to Matins in the church.

It would be dark yet three hours or more, and

the raw atmosphere bit to the bone. A thick November fog added opacity to the darkness and muffled the shuffling footsteps of the monks. Half-a-dozen torches, stuck at points of vantage by the way, flickered and sputtered in vain protest against conditions they were powerless to change. Through the fog the procession moved into the chancel. The fog was there before the monks, and, in spite of the altar ablaze with candles and numerous torches stuck about the stalls, it was a light more dim than religious by which the monks found the place in the breviary for the office of the day.

It may have been due to the atmospheric conditions, or perhaps it was because the light was uncertain; it may have been because the service was so long, or it may even have been possible that the good Dean Fletcher himself was so near asleep that his yawns diluted the spirit of the service; or, mayhap, St. Satan was more alert than usual this morning; it may have been by all these means combined, and by others which remain secret, that St. Satan had predetermined this a red letter day for the Abbey on his calendar. However it came about, it is soberly chronicled that matters were astir among the monks this morning entirely contrary to the letter and the spirit of the rubric.

While the strains of a "Gloria" were swelling triumphantly above the fog, a slip of parchment came mysteriously down the line into Brother Paul's hand. When he had surreptitiously mastered its contents, it just as mysteriously appeared

in the hand of Brother Thomas, who in due time passed it along to Brother Henry, who was singing like an angel by his side. The note simply inquired, "What ought to be the penance for a brother who has lost his heart to a maid, and is unrepentant?"

So subtly as to defy detection the spirit of levity pervaded the brotherhood, but the psalm still soared heavenward, the Dean singing heartily with the rest. Soon a large interrogation point, formed by a few strokes of a deft pen which had contorted the figure of a monk into the symbol, passed down the lines of singers. This the brothers promptly interpreted, "Who is the offender?"

But the antiphones fell into their places exactly as though the monks were not in a rear-guard action with the flesh, and getting the worst of it. The brethren sat impassive through the first lection, but ten verses of the longest psalm in the psalter had not been sung before another caricature of a monk touched the brothers' risibles, as it came down the line on a little square of parchment. There was no mistaking it! The grotesque figure held in its hand an episcopal staff, and the crook turned inward! It pictured an Abbot! But the monks sang on sublimely, as though carnal things were far away.

Between the pæans of two psalms, a monk advanced up the chancel.

"A confession, a confession and a penance, O my Father!" he said, standing before Dean Fletcher, his head bowed, his eyes on the pavement.

The monks craned their necks to see and to hear. It was Brother Brown, a simple, conscientious monk, whose confession would doubtless be entertaining. The Dean put up his hand, and silence fell upon the foggy chancel.

"Speak, my poor brother, speak," said the Dean in a sympathetic tone of voice.

In simple, broken accents the sinner laid bare his soul. "Many days have I been sorely tried," he sobbed. "The devil has well nigh had the best of me, in spite of prayer and penance, and much watching. My vow of chastity has been marvelously hard to keep. O, why is it? In spite of prayers and fasting, woman will come into my thoughts. Abbey walls are no remedy. When I thrust her out at one door she comes in smiling at another. Prayer helps me not. *Ave Marias* are a snare unto me, and a delusion."

The chancel was convulsed with suppressed merriment. The monks shuffled their feet noisily on the floor, they snickered, and some laughed outright. Dean Fletcher motioned a command to Brothers Geoffrey and Benedict, and those two monks passed down the chancel, reducing the Gospel and Epistle monks to a semblance of order.

"My rosary have I worn out," the unhappy man continued. "But 'tis no use. My wits are out and woman is in. I am no monk! Not yet have I fallen into carnal sin—"

Disappointment in the chancel passed into disgust. It was a tame ending to a tale that had prom-

ised much! The Dean suppressed the commotion with his hand, in order that Brother Brown might finish.

"—But my thoughts run on far ahead, and I'm as bad as fallen. But I make open confession, and seek forgiveness of the Brotherhood, and of God. Give me penance, reverend Father in God, to mend my sinful mind, and pluck me as a brand from the burning."

The penitent's voice was broken with pitiable sobs, and the soul-tragedy ought to have banished frivolity from the choir. Under normal conditions, doubtless, it would have stimulated true religious feeling. But this was the day of subtle vitiating influences and the hilarity of the monks was beyond recall. All eyes turned to the Dean. He sat evidently deep in thought, his hands folded deep in the sleeves of his habit, his head drawn back into his cowl. The Brotherhood quieted, awaiting the Dean's word.

"Brother Brown," the Dean said at length, shaking his head slowly, sadly, "It is indeed in deep waters that you are. But open confession is medicine for the soul. However, the matter comes to us too suddenly for immediate decision. Our judgment is that you hasten with this confession to our good Abbot. Tell him everything. With him will I confer, and together we will impose suitable penance. You have the prayers of us all,"—sweeping his hand over the choir. "Thyself must watch and pray."

The penitent knelt to receive the Dean's blessing, then with downcast eyes he slowly made his way out of the church.

When Matins ended, the monks dispersed from the Chapter House in a buzz of excited discussion of the one absorbing topic.

"We have fallen upon evil times," complained Brother Paul, as he and Brother Thomas lingered in the Chapter House. "What does it all mean?"

"The Abbot hath made a fool of himself," Thomas answered brusquely.

"What, in loving a maid? By sonties, monk's love is common enough beyond the moat,"—and Brother Paul held up his hands in good-humored protest.

"No! No! Not in loving, but in being caught at it!" corrected Brother Thomas. Brother Paul's eyes twinkled, and, banter and seriousness equally mixed in his tones, he replied:

"I can put a shaft nearer the bull's eye yet, brother mine. Not in being caught, but in letting Dean Fletcher catch him, lies the Abbot's sin and peril! I fear me for the Abbot!"

"But, Brother Paul, what hath the Abbot really done? Rumor is an ill-favored wench I trow, and her tongue needs clipping. What lies at the bottom of the silly gossip?"

"Nay, I know no more than you, Brother Thomas. But 'tis freely circulated that he hath miscomported himself with the woman Heloise at the Manor House, and that he would resign the Abbacy to

become her husband. Heard you ever the like?" The monk laughed at the sheer humor of the situation.

"Pshaw! Pshaw! What folly!" chuckled Brother Thomas. "If all the monks who love left the cloisters, the Holy Houses would be desolate! And then, to marry! What need? Ah! Ah! Why just look at Brother—"

"Yes, yes, I know," broke in Brother Paul. "But Dean Fletcher has determined upon stricter discipline henceforth for Thornton. I suppose that if the Abbot's star wanes the Dean's will wax. There's astrology for you! The Dean declares stoutly for the punishment of all who break rule."

"But how can an Abbot be disciplined? Tell me that."

"The Bishop, my good brother, the Bishop must discipline your namesake."

"Nay! Nay!" answered Brother Thomas promptly. "We will manage without His Grace. As well invite the lion inside the fold to regulate the sheep! Once the Bishop got his hand on our affairs, Thornton would straightway lose a liberty or forego a privilege. You may trust the Dean to manage without the Bishop! His Grace would have a candidate for the office vacated by the Abbot's discipline, and Dean Fletcher might not be the man! Mark me; you will see no Bishop in this affair!"

"Bishop or no Bishop, something will happen. At compline last night the gossip was of severe

measures. The Fletcher men are determined on that. 'Twas said we should discipline the body to save the soul. It would never do to let the Abbot resign and wed. Too many might follow that pleasant path! An Abbot's punishment might save many to the rule. A White Newhouse Canon, recently returned from Italy, told us how that Pope Urban had tortured for their sins even Cardinals, until they had died! He openly advocated trial for the Abbot, and the severest penalty, should he be found guilty. The White Canons are ever ready to discipline the Black, you know!"

"But I see no way whereby we may discipline an Abbot," persisted Brother Thomas. "Let him resign, and wed!"

"The Dean will find a way!" retorted Brother Paul. "You'll see! A clever way, that will hide itself! Abbot Thomas will never wed! How queer it is! The Abbot wants the woman of the Manor House; the Dean wants the land! I wager the Dean will win!"

"I'll wager my salvation," Brother Thomas retorted, "that the Dean would grab the woman too, if he could get her! She's right fair to look upon!"

Between Nones and Vespers that same day, Dean Fletcher issued from the Deanery, wrapped equally well in his habit and in meditation. His thin face was impassive and showed no knowledge of the prevailing temper of the Abbey, though, as a matter of fact, it was of his own clever instiga-

tion. A group of monks at the fountain halted the common gossip as he passed, but the Dean seemed neither to see nor hear. On his way, he glanced at the dial, but saw not the hour, though the sun, having conquered the fog, still cast a sharp shadow. His steps were bent toward the Abbot's House, and he seemed preoccupied. As he turned towards the old Gate House, the Dean's eye, which had been blind to everything else, evidently saw Guilbert de Rouen, who was seated on a bench in the vestibule of the Chapter House, and his face relaxed into a smile, and he changed his course across the garth toward the architect.

"Congratulations, Guilbert mine, upon the completion of your work at the Abbey!" exclaimed the Dean, with outstretched hand. "You have fulfilled your contract well. Whither go you next?"

"Knew you not, Dean Fletcher? The church at Thornton needs repairs. My men and I leave the Abbey tomorrow. Awhile we shall be busy at the parish church. After that I know not yet where we go. There's work enough, never fear. The Bishop spoke of work to be done in the cathedral. We may go to Lincoln, when we are through at Thornton."

"We shall miss you greatly, Guilbert. God speed you in the big outside world." The Dean lapsed into silence, and marked the pavement with his toe, his eyes upon the ground, as though balancing in his mind matters of grave moment.

Guilbert thanked him for his kindly interest, and waited. Presently the Dean continued:

"Guilbert mine, I envy you your range of the world. You breathe keen air from city to city. You meet the world's men, and stay with them only so long as you and they are fresh the one to the other, then you away to new men and new problems. But for me, the moat of this house is my horizon. The problem of these poor souls is with me till it stales, and doggedly it stays mine even then. The good Lord forgive me if I weary of it at times! Just now am I sorely perplexed and know not what to do."

The Dean had seated himself on the bench, opposite Guilbert. He rested his elbows on his knees and buried his face in his hands disconsolately. Guilbert was touched by this unusual exhibition of feeling.

"Why, Dean Fletcher! What unmans you?" he said, sympathetically. "Has aught gone amiss?"

The Dean remained silent, his face still in his hands. Evidently his burden was heavy. At length he answered, his voice sad: "You are going from our Abbey life, Guilbert, and I may trust my burden to your keep. Perhaps you can counsel me, for you are wise, as men count wisdom. It may have escaped your ken, but the discipline of this house is sorely undermined by the evil example of one man's grave sin. It is a delicate and difficult matter, but the solution of it devolves on me, and I know not what to do."

It was unusual for an ecclesiastic to seek counsel from a layman in matters spiritual, but Guilbert's peculiar training had given him intimate knowledge of monastic life, so he was not entirely on foreign ground when he asked the Dean to tell him plainly of his troubles.

"The breach is of the rule of chastity," answered the Dean, in tones entirely hopeless.

"Why not inform the Abbot, convene the Chapter, and deal with the offender according to the canons? To a layman that would seem to be the thing to do," answered Guilbert, surprised that a course so obvious had not already been taken.

A faint smile fleeted over the Dean's face. He turned to his companion gravely. "You strike the very heart of my problem." Then he hesitated, as if loath to go on. "It grieves me to say it," he continued, "but,—measure my perplexity, Guilbert de Rouen, if you can,—Abbot Thomas himself is the transgressor! How can a stream be pure if its source be polluted?"

Guilbert was astounded. Dean Fletcher deftly detailed the story, without, however, identifying the woman in the case. To Guilbert the affair was horrible, incredible, impossible. Impatiently he broke in upon the Dean.

"There is some hideous mistake! Investigate. Run the foul gossip to earth! Sift Dame Rumor's reports! You will find the Abbot is guiltless. I tell you Abbot Thomas is innocent! The man is

the very soul of honor. 'Tis all gossip, the foul machination of the devil!"

"Alas! Alas! Guilbert, would that what you say were true! But I may not disbelieve mine own eyes. Personally I know gossip speaks truth. I myself saw them together in the oak room of the Manor House. They were sitting on the couch, opposite the open lattice. The woman Heloise rested her head on his shoulder, and they cooed and billed like two turtle-doves."

Guilbert sprang to his feet, amazed, disgusted.

"Slanderer!" he cried. "How dare you link her name thus with the name of a monk, and hint that she could even dream of wrong? You blaspheme a virtue you cannot understand! 'Tis a lie, I say!"

The Dean smiled faintly at Guilbert's vehemence. He too had risen, and stood before Guilbert, slowly shaking his head, as though profoundly sorry that the lot had fallen upon him to disillusion so good a man of so high an ideal. Guilbert turned to go, biting his lip to control himself. The Dean advanced and put a firm hand upon his shoulder, and said, gently and gravely, and with a great show of sympathy.

"I know it seems impossible, and it is intolerable," he said, sadly. "I, too, have your feeling in the matter. How could two so high fall so low? But with mine own eyes and ears I saw and heard."

The Dean paused a moment, as though reluctant to finish, than added—"Guilbert, you must believe

it. 'Twas in August I first saw them, and the foulness has been growing worse ever since. What shall I do? Common report has it that the Abbot will resign to wed. Such evil times! Truly the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked!"

Dean Fletcher strode off towards the old Gate House. St. John, fishing in the moat, noted signs of happiness on the Dean's thin face as he passed, and wondered what had set him chuckling almost to the point of laughter.

There was no smile on Guilbert's face. He huddled into a corner of the stone bench, sick at heart, nauseated with the world. The Dean's words explained so much in the relationship of the Abbot and Heloise which had been a daily puzzle to him, that there must be some truth in them. His whole soul rebelled against the situation; it was so unnatural, so preposterous, so impossible, so unlike either Heloise or Abbot Thomas. To be rivaled was bad enough,—but by a monk, and that monk his friend—the Abbot! The thought was unbearable; the fact would be hell. Half an hour he sat shivering on the edge of this new, bitter, unknown world. Then strength stole into his heart. He arose and traversed the church homeward. At the chancel he turned and knelt awhile before the altar. His prayer was that he might be worthy of her, and that she might be saved from the evil of the world. New faith in Heloise and in God strengthened him as he passed out of the church.

CHAPTER X. INQUISITION

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INQUISITION

IN WHICH SHADOWS DEEPEN ABOUT THE PATH OF A GOOD MAN, AND THE THORNTON CANONS WAX SOLICITOUS ABOUT THE WELFARE OF THE ABBOT'S SOUL

At the peep of dawn in the month of May—after a pitiless winter, in which cold and hunger had further fostered the spirit of revolt among the villeinage over the land; during which time, kept alive by his continual monstrous depredations, the dread of the Green Devil had increased in castle, church, and cot; during which time, also, the spirit of faction in the Abbey had developed into a most bitter feud, and had made a breach which the good living of the Abbot was powerless to heal—Dean Fletcher was dressing himself in his bedroom at the Deanery. Gregorian harmony floated the poetry of the Shepherd Psalm to him across the garth from the church, but both psalm and music missed their mark this morning. The Dean seemed to be greatly preoccupied, and a manifest nervousness would seem to indicate that he was apprehensive of something threatening either his person or his plans. The movements necessary to the putting on of his garments he punctuated by furtive glances into the corners of the room, where the

shadows were still untouched by the slow dawn. Darkness did not seem to be congenial to him, possibly because he was alone. When daylight came, doubtless he would be happier.

After fastening the latchet of his sandals, he stepped to a little stand at the head of his bed and poured out a bumper of ale, and drained it to the last drop. Returning the horn to the table with a gesture of impatience, he exclaimed to himself, "To the foul fiend with dreams and visions of the night! Am I a girl, that I should be afraid of shadows? Or come ghosts to the Abbey at Thornton?"

Then he laughed uneasily, and a footfall under his window startled him. He wiped perspiration from his brow, and under his breath muttered, "Why should I fear?"

But he eyed the shadows again! Courage seemed to come with reflection, for he went the round of the room, poked his foot where the shadows lay thickest, moved the tapestry with his hand so that the hanging folds shook out their shadows. When he had thus proved nothing but himself in the room, he fell into an uncomfortable little laugh. "Well knew I there was naught but shadows! My conscience is cowardly."

Something in the expression touched a hidden spring of merriment. "Conscience! Conscience!" he exclaimed, "Ha! Ha! Conscience—a convenient figment of monkish imagination!"

He had spoken only *sotto voce*, but the undertone

of his own voice seemed to affect him even more than the shadows. The very picture of discomfort, he dropped into a chair, and shut his jaws tightly as though to prevent further speech. The peculiar nervous idiosyncrasy which was so characteristic of the man's inner nature asserted itself. Like the forked tongue of a poisonous snake his wiry tongue flashed between his thin lips, and, moving from corner to corner of his mouth, left behind a glistening strip of moisture, which, however, the incessant fever of his nature speedily dried up again, and called for a repetition of the operation.

The door of the Dean's wardrobe, off from his bedroom, stood ajar, and one could see, hanging in their places, rows of ecclesiastical garments in somber black, relieved here and there with strips of color where hung the brighter vestments of the church. A green vestment hung among the rest. Likely it had been last used, and so had been hung near the door. Perhaps yesterday the rubric had called for green vestments, the color which symbolizes Hope and Peace. Evidently green was not to be used in the ritual of to-day. For the Dean arose, picked up some articles from the floor, and carried them into the closet. When he returned, the green vestment was out of sight. Doubtless, the next day for its use was some distance down the calendar, and the Dean carried the bright color into the more remote parts of the wardrobe, there to hang until the Sacred Year should bring on another day proper for its use.

His toilet ended, the Dean pushed aside the portiere of tapestry and entered the adjoining room. The light was now sufficient to define the objects in the room, and the Dean's spirits arose accordingly. He rang a small bell which stood upon the table, then turned to his desk and began to sort the confusion of parchments with which it was burdened. Presently, in answer to the bell, the door opened and a lay servitor entered.

"You may bring me refreshments, William," said the Dean. "Anything you have. I am hungry, and have dispensation to break fast."

In due time viands were set upon the table, and the Dean ate with such appetite that one would judge supper must have been omitted from his fare the day before. As the servitor left the room the Dean remarked, "You may tell Brother Geoffrey to report to me here before tierce."

The Dean concluded his disposition of the mutton pasty in a manner that should have driven pallor from his cheek. But whatever were the Dean's prospects, they failed to bring him quiet. He was agitated and expectant. He cast frequent glances sunward, as though the early morning hours were long. Shortly before tierce Brother Geoffrey appeared, and the Dean turned eagerly to greet him.

"Well, Geoffrey, what find you? What is the outlook?" Through a mask of gaiety anxiety showed in the Dean's tones. "Be seated. Tell me what you know."

The monk took a stool and began. "The time is surely ripe. The major part of the Brotherhood desire to proceed to judgment. Abbot Thomas has not more than half a dozen monks left in the Abbey. The pious fools affect not to believe the Abbot guilty! But we need not fear them. The pious are ever easy to manage! They are so simple!" With a lively sense of favors to come at the hands of the new Abbot, the monk continued. "There is undoubtedly enough evidence at command to convict and to depose the Abbot. Once he were out of the way, you would have the vacant chair, Bishop or no Bishop."

The Dean's face was a study. He meditated awhile, tapping the table with his fingers, then he spoke in an even voice. "Brother Geoffrey, we must proceed carefully. It were a sin to bring a false accusation against the Lord's anointed. But, what saith gossip on the garth upon the question of punishment? Heard you aught of that?"

"As you know, Dean Fletcher, one cannot tell beforehand what the Chapter may do. But the Brotherhood is a unit in that something should be done for the good of the Abbot's soul, and all desire adequate punishment. Without that, discipline in the Abbey is at an end, and more than one soul may be lost. Better one suffer than all! The Chapter, however, must decide what the punishment shall be. But, by Saint Satan, I do not think the sentence will be light!"

"Here comes another with report, unless I miss

my guess," answered the Dean, and added, as Brother Geoffrey rose to go, "Nay, you need not go. There is no secret between us three."

There came a knock at the door. In obedience to the Dean's command Brother Benedict stepped into the room.

"The Abbot hath left the Abbey," said he, manifestly excited. "He hath gone to Barrowe, to overlook the house of Roger the clerk. Repairs were reported needed. The Abbot thought best to entrust the setting of them afoot to no one but himself. He will not be back till sunset,—so I overheard him tell St. John. He must now be as far as Thornton on his way."

With this Brother Benedict withdrew. The Dean turned to Geoffrey, the suppressed feeling of the morning now riotous in his face.

"I knew he would be Barrowe-ward today! While he's gone the Dean rules—so saith the rubric! Go, convene the Chapter at Nones, a special, urgent session! In my name send St. John with the Abbot's men—you know who they are—to Newhouse to inquire whether the Brethren have trace of the treasure-trove the Green Devil stole. 'Twill keep them busy till tomorrow! The die will be cast before sun-down today!"

A green light gleamed in the Dean's eye as he turned to his desk. His lips came together very firmly. The nervous grip of his thumb and finger crushed his quill flat, and the neb scratched on the parchment as he wrote furiously. Evidently

he was set on a purpose, and would pursue it to the end. Perhaps his long-sought goal was almost in sight!

After a short psalm and lection in the chancel at Nones the Dean led the Brotherhood into the Chapter House. As he looked upon the sedilia crowded with his brethren, all tense with illy suppressed feeling, a faint smile flitted across his face. The monks were eager to anticipate what might take place. Beneath the surface, the Dean was not less anxious, but outwardly he was calm.

The Dean arose to lay a painful matter before the Chapter. It was his sorrowful duty to attaint the Abbot of evil living. The woman Heloise, of the Manor House,—whose lands ought to be on the Abbey roll,—was as bad as the Abbot's wife, to the great scandal of the Brotherhood. They well knew the facts. The evidence was a matter of public fame. He was reluctant to proceed against a man otherwise so worthy, but only rigorous discipline would save the Abbot's soul. It was kindly to proceed during the Abbot's absence, for thus would they prevent public humiliation. He would introduce certain evidence, then the Chapter would be ready to proceed to judgment.

"Call Brother Brown," said the Dean quietly, moistening his lips.

Skilful questioning brought from the simple man the story of his confession. His sin had been that of entertaining woman in his thought. He had made public confession at Matins one day in the

autumn of the year. Dean Fletcher had commanded him to carry his confession to Abbot Thomas.

"I went to the Abbot," continued the monk, unconscious that he was but a tool in the hands of crafty men. "I knelt at his feet and repeated my confession. Instead of censuring me, the Abbot wept. He lifted me to my feet, and set me on a stool by his side. Then he chatted with me merrily, and made me tell him all about when I was a boy, and went a-fishing to the river. He did not seem to care about my sin. When I asked him for penance he put his hand upon my head and said, 'My poor Brother! My poor, poor Brother!' Then he turned his head away and laughed, but did not seem to laugh at me. He laughed until he cried. Then he told me that women were not devils. His mother and mine were women, he said, and we owed them all we have. The nuns, too, were women; so were our sisters according to the flesh. He said we could not keep women out of our mind, and I half believe he spoke the truth! Then, to himself rather than to me, he said that the follies of the monks ought to be enlightened, and that if the blind led the blind both would wander into the ditch,—which expression I did not understand, and do not now."

"What penance did the Abbot impose?" queried the Dean, sharply.

"He told me to go away and think my mind full about God, about His Son, and about His Blessed

Mother, to harbor sweet thoughts and kind, and that with such resisting of the devil he would surely flee away. Those were the Abbot's very words."

A great sensation swept the assembly. To these men the penitent monk's testimony damned the man whose fine soul it so artlessly revealed. There could be no doubt whatever of the Abbot's awful guilt!

Dean Fletcher arose to the occasion. The fear of the morning's early twilight had left him. Whatever might be the price of success he was now ready to pay. He explained to the assembly that he himself had long held the Abbot guiltless. The tongue of gossip was a deadly weapon and ought to be silenced. He would condemn no man on mere rumor. Had there been no other evidence than that already submitted, the inquisition had never been held. But it was his painful duty to introduce the evidence of his own eyes.

Very reluctantly he told them that one day last summer, as he passed an open casement at the Manor House, he was shocked beyond measure to see the Abbot and Heloise reclining together upon a couch in the old oak room. It was not necessary to specify further particulars. He knew personally and particularly that the Abbot was guilty of evil relations with the Lady Heloise of the Manor House. Furthermore, Brother Brown's evidence clearly showed how the Abbot's sin had incapacitated him for the administration of dis-

cipline. The very foundations of the Abbey were threatened by its Head's lax living. For the sake of the Abbot's soul, the Dean would be obliged to cast his vote in favor of condemnation. The punishment should be both remedial and exemplary.

The Dean drew a parchment from his sleeve, and continued, "Furthermore, Brethren mine, here is additional and incontrovertible proof of the Abbot's guilt. He placed this parchment in my hands this morning, before he went afield. Let me read.

'To the Chapter of St. Mary's at Thornton,
Greeting:

Hereby I tender my resignation of the Abbacy at Thornton, to take effect July first next. I still love the Austin rule, and the old monastic life. But changed times bring new duties. The monastic life no longer provides the best means for the furtherance of the old religion. To be true unto myself, and to promote the gospel, I must forth into a larger world, to live an ampler life.

Thomas de Gretham.' "

The Dean resumed his seat. Brothers Geoffrey and Benedict looked at each other and smiled, the logic of this resignation was so good! Silence fell upon the Brotherhood. Perhaps here was an easy way out! Let the Abbot resign! Thus would the Dean become Abbot without friction. Also the lands of the Manor House would doubtless soon belong to the Abbey.

But, alas—! Only the enlightened love the simple and the straightforward. The closer to the primal men live, the more clever mere animal cunning seems to be. It seems wise to be tortuous, clever to keep one's direction in a maze. Moreover, here was an immortal soul at stake! Ought the Brotherhood to allow the Abbot to resign in order that he might wed, and so lose his soul?

"Ballot!" cried the Dean. "Black condemns; white acquits."

Silence came a moment or two, broken shortly by the noisy hail-like staccato of the little spheres as the monks dropped them one by one into the brass box. Gradually the confusion quieted, till when the Dean arose to announce the result a silence laden with suspense rested on the Brotherhood. The Dean's face was pale, his lips were very dry, and he steadied himself on the table by which he stood.

"There—are—no—white—balls," he announced, slowly, impressively. "All—are—BLACK! Abbot Thomas is—is deposed!"

A furtive look crossed the Dean's face as he spoke, as though he caught a distant glimpse of certain consequences of this action. But he held himself firmly to his task. The suspense among the monks broke into a buzz of excited conversation that did not end until Brother Geoffrey called attention to the fact that the sentence remained yet to be fixed.

Then came animated though grave discussion. The sentence ought to be severe; it must be secret. But how combine severity with secrecy? Not an iota of the matter must leak beyond the walls, at least not until the Brotherhood had selected a new Abbot, or the Bishop would be sure to interfere.

It was the Dean who suggested the solution to the problem. Let both the sentence and its execution be delegated to a commission of three. Let the commission arraign the Abbot, listen to, and duly weigh, any defense he might make, then pass upon him suitable sentence—all under a most solemn oath of secrecy.

Under this astute plan not even the Brotherhood would know that a sentence had been passed, or have an inkling of the nature of it, or of the manner of its execution. Neither the Abbey nor the outside world would ever know how the Brotherhood disciplined its Abbot. The presidency of the commission fell upon the Dean himself, with Brothers Geoffrey and Benedict as assessors. When the Chapter broke up these judiciaries retired to the Deanery for conference.

As soon as the garth was clear, Brother Geoffrey emerged, crossed towards the shops, and shortly returned with two lay brothers, whom he led into the Deanery. The Dean and Brother Benedict were busy at the table when Brother Geoffrey ushered in the laymen. The Dean looked the two men squarely in the eye. "Will Winter, so you

would belong to the Brotherhood?" he inquired. "And you, too, Jim Stubbs?"

"Aye! We would, if we be counted worthy," Winter answered for both. The men shuffled about uneasily under the spell of the Dean's eye.

"'Tis well," answered the Dean. "Obedience is the prime virtue; unquestioned, perpetual obedience, in things small as well as great. Blind obedience and absolute secrecy are lessons you must learn to-day! I shall assign you a simple task that may seem strange. You must do it secretly, without question. Speak never a word of it one to another, to any of us, or to any soul within or without the Abbey walls, so long as you shall live, on penalty of everlasting fire. Will you obey?"

"Aye! Aye! We will obey!" the men answered, supposing that they assented to a part of the rubric of initiation into the order to which they aspired.

"I told you, Winter, about the Ghost that haunts Abbot Thomas's bedroom. We lay the trap for it tonight. Half an hour hence, meet me at the place and I will show you what to do. Remember to keep the matter secret. Obedience will get you into the Brotherhood. Are you ready for the oath?" Dean Fletcher continued. The three monks arose solemnly, and the Dean administered the oath.

"In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, of the Blessed Virgin and the Holy Saints, you do swear instant, unquestioned, complete

obedience to your Superiors and to the Austin Order, this day and forever. Most solemnly you do swear to forever keep secret the commands of this day, and also their execution. If you fail to do jot or tittle, or if jot or tittle of what you do escape your lips, may the hair of your head be turned to thistles, your skin dry on your flesh like parchment, your limbs rot in their sockets and fall away. May terror pursue you by day and ghosts gibber at you by night, and the Devil hale you to the Pit long before you are dead!"

Answering a glance, Brother Geoffrey handed the Dean two arrows, and Brother Benedict set on the table a tiny bowl half filled with a sickly green liquid. In calm, mesmeric tones the Dean continued, "This is deadly poison." He coolly stirred the liquid with the tips of the arrows. "The slightest scratch from these means instant death! Stand stock-still, on your lives!"

The Dean flourished the poisoned tips, one in each hand, close to the ashen faces of the astounded men. "If a syllable of this initiation ceremony escape your lips, I will have you butts for these tipped arrows. Put the arrows in the yellow quiver, ready," he added to Geoffrey, handing him the shafts. To the trembling laymen, he then continued, in the short sharp tones of order. "A pile of brick lies near the Abbot's kitchen door. Clean them up ready for use, and stack them in the kitchen. Slack lime and make mortar, enough and more, to lay the brick. With your tools be

ready to lay the brick at any moment I may call you. Fail not, under your oath, or arrows from the yellow quiver shall stick you before the sand changes in an hour-glass! Go!"

As the men went out the Dean said, "The fools will be as secret as the grave they build!"

CHAPTER XI. AN ABBOT'S MAYING

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WHICH SETS FORTH THE MIRACLE OF SPRING IN THE HEART OF MAN AND MAID, AND RECORDS HOW THE ABBOT NERVED HIMSELF FOR A PEOPLE'S QUEST, ALL UNCONSCIOUS THAT AUGHT SINISTER LAY ACROSS HIS PATH

It was a care-free Abbot who inspected the cottage of Roger the clerk at Barrowe the day of the Thornton Inquisition. His resignation of the Abbacy proved to be the cutting of a Gordian knot that rolled a heavy load off his shoulders. A strange elation lightened his step and brightened his world, and a song without words lilted itself in his heart. His pathway now seemed clear, and the holiday spirit within him joyed in the glad summer day. He was as happy as though he were a boy again. The excellent Roger and his spouse, bubbling over with hospitality, were grateful for the visit of a man so distinguished. The house certainly needed repairs,—the roof should be re-thatched; a new door should replace the one hung by the mechanic who built the house a hundred years ago; and the kitchen plainly needed a new lattice. The Abbot promised to send the Thornton mechanics on the morrow.

Beneath the blossom of the orchard the Abbot and the clerk visited together, while the good dame

prepared dinner and put the house in order. All about them birds were nesting, and the air was laden with the fragrance of spring flowers. The drone of bees proclaimed the presence of a row of hives among the bushes at the bottom of the garden. Nature's music was everywhere, and the men's hearts were gladly in tune. They talked of Brotherhood, of the hard social conditions fast ripening into revolt, of the sad plight of the villeinage, which surely must be mended soon, or worse would come of it. The twain were inspired by the Spring-tide hope that things were about to be better. From his pouch the Abbot produced a small volume and read aloud:—

"Lo here is fellowship:
  One faith to hold,
  One truth to speak,
  One wrong to wreak,
One loving cup to sup,
  And to dip
In one dish faithfully,
  As lambkins of one fold:
Either for other to suffer all things.
  One song to sing,
In sweet accord to make much melody.
Right so thou and I good fellows be:
  Now God us thee!"

"I make more copies of that," quoth the clerk, "than of anything else, unless it be Wyclif's Vernacular. 'Tis a noble vision. Suppose you, 'twill ever come true, Abbot Thomas?" Something wistful lurked in the clerk's face and voice.

"All vision tends to fulfill itself, my son, as the

slow years go by," answered the Abbot. Then, perhaps because of the disappointment which clouded the clerk's face by reason of this tacit postponement of the triumph of the People's Cause, he added more hopefully, "Brother Roger, even you and I may live to see mankind on a pilgrimage to Truth. When men seek truth our wrongs will soon be ended. But, patience! We must have patience—the patience of Job and of Noah, my son, that suffers in quietness while it halts not the building of the ark!"

Laughter, merry and child-like, floated up from the bottom of the orchard, where a sturdy lad and a buxom lass hunted bird-nests in the hedge. The men's attention was attracted by the idyl, and they could but overhear.

"It's a cuddy!" cried the boy, and the girl ran to him. Then two heads, close together, peered into the bush, the boy holding the thorns aside that his sister might see the newly found nest.

"One! Two! Three! Four! Five!" the girl cried in ecstasy. "There'll be another tomorrow! There's the little mother! Don't frighten her! Come away!"

"Thine?" the Abbot asked the clerk, waving his hand towards the children.

"Aye! Mine!" responded Roger. "'Tis truly a ponderous mystery! I started to take holy orders, but Editha captured me,—or I captured Editha!" he added, whimsically, "before my vows were taken. I know not whether it was for the better or the worse.

The best of the church, as we count the best things, has been closed to me, and I have been tied to outside pen and parchment. But my children have opened life to me more than all the books I have read. I never knew myself until I saw myself coming up again in the lad and lass. They tell my own story over again to myself. I am a better man for them, though for them I have missed so much that ecclesiastics count worth having. I have thought I would give them to the church. But! O, there's a big 'but,' I can tell you! Doubtless it is of the Devil, but hardly dare I commit our babes to a life which would cut off from themselves the illumination they have been to me. I fear't is heresy, but they say Wyclif teaches that priests may marry. My experience points that way. What say you?"

The Abbot listened gravely to this revelation of the clerk's inmost heart, and answered, tentatively, and slowly, "Nay, my brother; I know not what to think. The mystery is too deep, and reaches too high. I—have—had—my—battle." Then he paused, and after reflection, which however did not bring the note of conviction into his voice, he added, "Perhaps the Poor Priests are right."

The youngsters' quest drew them toward the bench beneath the apple tree, where the men sat, and their merry laughter floated up among the spring foliage.

"Come hither, lambkins," cried the Abbot. He made a place for them on the bench beside him,

and soon his wonderful fairy-tales opened wide their eyes. He told them of the beautiful princess who was locked in the haunted tower, and of the spirit of Evil which had thrown the pearly key down the well so that the Knight of Truth could not find it, though he hunted for it, through hunger and cold, by day and by night, o'er hill and dale. When dinner was announced, the Abbot, with a hand upon the head of each child, threaded the trim, box-lined gravel walks to the cottage, followed by the good Roger, who ruminated on the things which easily might have been for the Abbot.

"You will not steal the eggs?" said the Abbot, as they entered the cottage.

"Nay!" answered the lad sturdily. "Robbers steal, and the foul Green Devil!"

The meal was seasoned with sprightly talk and fine courtesy. When the good dame's viands had routed hunger, the genial Abbot found the pearly key for the children, and put it into the hands of the knight errant of Truth, who forthwith liberated the charming princess, and the wedding bells cracked themselves with joy! The children clapped their hands gleefully. At the sight of their happiness the good dame's face wreathed with smiles, and Roger and the Abbot forthwith harked back to boyhood days. It was good to be alive this happy day in May, and to feel one's heart beat sympathetically with the great world.

It was two by the dial when the Abbot took his leave of the Clerk's cot. At the village he sauntered

through the church yard, attracted by strains of worship coming from the church. There was but a bare handful of worshipers, and a couple of secular priests droned through the office of the hour. Unobserved the Abbot slipped in among the worshipers. 'Twas good to pour out his heart to God who had made this glory of May for man and beast and bird. But, somehow, the service seemed bare and barren, and the church empty. Into the Abbot's mind would troop England's countless multitudes, in want and woe, untouched by the listless ministrations of the church. Unbidden, came into his mind Wyclif's bands of Poor Priests—the priests and prophets of hedge and wayside. The Abbot had meditated much on the problem, and now it came upon him like a vision, that England's lowly folk had in these Poor Preachers the friend and truth they needed, and that thus might villeinage be brought to know the yoke that is easy and the burden that is light. The Abbot's heart bounded with a great gladness, and he sang the doxology with such spirit that all eyes turned upon him, and folk wondered why the Abbot of Thornton worshiped in the church at Barrowe.

From the church the Abbot sauntered through the hamlet up the hill toward Thornton, switching at the wayside brush with his cane as he walked, humming blithely, now a troubador song, now a chant of the church. At the crest of the hill he rested on a boulder, and fell into meditation.

There was much to think about. Ere this his

resignation would be public at the Abbey. He was glad to have it in his power to heal dissention in the Brotherhood—as he thought—by vacating his office. He rejoiced in the prospect of a united Brotherhood, though it would doubtless be under the rule of Dean Fletcher, of whose character he did not have a very high opinion. In an open glade close by, lambs frolicked in the sunshine. Perhaps lambs suggested shepherds, and shepherds led villeins by the hand into his thought. The Abbot took a little black book from his wallet and read:—

"'I have no penny pullets for to[1] buy, nor neither geese nor pigs, but two green cheeses, a few curds and cream, and an oaten cake, and two loaves of beans and bran baken for my children. I have no salt bacon, nor no cooked meat collops for to make, but I have parsley and leeks and many cabbage plants, and eke a cow and a calf, and a cart-mare to draw a-field my dung while the drought lasteth, and by this livelihood we must all live till Lammas-tide, and by that I hope to have harvest in my croft.'"

"I wonder not that the poor mistrust and hate us," he murmured, as he brought forth another little book from his wallet, and in it found a much-thumbed place, where he read this significant passage from the pen of John Wyclif:—

"The right to govern depends upon good government; there is no moral constraint to pay tax or

[1] Sell

tithe to bad rulers, either in the church or in the state; it is permitted to put an end to tyranny, to punish or depose unjust rulers, and to resume the wealth which the clergy have diverted from the poor."

He closed the black letter page and fell to thinking. The picture of poverty drawn by William Langland was so true, every line of it, and also so sad. Moreover, what a tremendous suggestion was contained in this last line from Wyclif. But was the remedy of the Reformer just? Without doubt it was revolutionary. Put into effect, it would undoubtedly lead to bloodshed. But, despite the difficulties, the Abbot intuitively felt that John Wyclif was right, and his heart warmed towards the old man. The people held in their own hand the potent remedy for their woes. Taxes need not be paid if they were unjust, neither to Rome nor to London. But, were the people wise enough and strong enough to use this new creed? They sorely needed leaders. They were like sheep scattered and without shepherd. The Abbot pondered long, balanced the probable and the improbable, the possible and the certain in his mind, and the end of his meditation was that, mentally, he stole fully into Wyclif's camp. Now that he was free from the Abbacy, he would devote his life to the betterment of the poor, be a Wyclifite, heresy or no heresy, let the outcome be whatever it might.

The struggle was wholly within. There was no outward sign of the greatness of the moment. So

undisturbed was the Abbot externally that the lambs left their playground to gambol about his feet. But when he resumed consciousness toward his outward environment the lambs scampered away!

"All the world has learned to distrust a monk," he murmured, with a touch of bitterness. Then, as though he would begin the new life straightway, he held out his hand, and the spirit that moved him from Assisi called, "Come, lambkins, come! Hurt you I will not. Come, come; come, lambkins!"

And as nature's simpler children answered the gentle spirit of St. Francis more than a hundred years before, so these timid lambs turned to the new Abbot, and he petted them; and, being a poet, he fancied the incident might be prophetic. Perhaps England's scattered sheep might turn to the shepherd with the new spirit. Then he walked toward Thornton, planning his closing work for the Abbey as he went, outlining to himself his line of action when he should have laid down the ecclesiastical crook.

At Thornton he hurried by the inn and the church, and in a woodsy lane beyond he quickened his steps at the glimpse of a red kirtle in the road. Could it be? Yes! The Fates are kind to lovers! Heloise also, was a-Maying, and, with her arms laden with spring flowers, she advanced to meet her tutor.

"A thousand blessings on you and your flowers," was his greeting.

"Do you bless things animate and inanimate equally, O indiscriminate?" she questioned play-

fully, pleasure mantling her cheek and dancing in her eyes.

They turned toward the Manor House as naturally as though the act were strictly conventional. She invited him in to sup with her, and the happy man was glad to yield. He would eat salt with his pupil, and then away to the Abbey, where, truth to tell, he was not a little curious, and even anxious, to learn how his resignation had been received.

Heloise ordered supper for two in a sequestered spot in the garden, and honest Martin Reeve served. While Martin spread the rustic table,—muttering to himself sundry objurations about the inconvenience, and wondering why the Lady Heloise could not order supper indoors, the Abbot and Heloise sat together on the green grass.

The spirit of May rested upon them. Heloise plucked flowers, and the Abbot responded with fairy tales, into which he wove the symbolism of lofty ideals that kindled her eye and set her blood a-tingle. His mood today made him half in jest, half in earnest. A whimsical spirit like very witchery itself possessed the Abbot, and Heloise was quick to understand and appreciate the flashes of his genius. Her presence called him up into his better self. From the symbolism of fairyland they drifted among books and great clerks, spicing sober things with laughter, pouring their healthy merriment into the amphora of the ancient lore. Even here Heloise was the Abbot's equal. Because she was his equal she seemed to him to be much more, for such intellec-

tual equality between man and woman was very rare.

The relationship between Heloise and the Abbot had become somewhat amended since its first discovery in the oak room at the Manor House. Experience had modified feeling. Significantly, it was the woman who had lifted the man to her exalted position. Without doubt the Abbot would have cut loose from his ecclesiastical vows to wed Heloise. But she held him strictly to his original high purpose, yet in such a way that he was contented and happy, and held her in constant reverence.

After awhile a quiet fell about the table, as when all the birds stop singing in the woods before a thunderstorm. The Abbot and Heloise began to talk of the villeins and their troubles, and of how they might find a way to help the suffering poor.

"I have resigned the Abbacy," he remarked casually, when there came a pause.

At the word Heloise caught a quick breath, and a shadow spoiled her face. "Nay, nay, my Lord! Tell me not that! Why should you resign? Have the gossips smoked you out?" she answered, disapproval strong in her voice.

"No, not exactly that! But it will be better for the House when I am gone. I have become a bone of contention, and 'tis time I were buried out of sight! But there are other and weightier reasons. You and I, Heloise, have had a vision of the poor, and have been sobered by their plaint—"

"Truly, truly," she broke in upon him, fearing what might come. "But you will not, you must not, you cannot resign your office for that. That were to throw away power when power you most need. Think what it means to your future. You have won so far that, even tip-toe, I cannot see the end of your ecclesiastical career—a bishopric, Canterbury, Legate, and mayhap, St. Peter's chair! In the tangle of our time strong men may win far. For the sake of your future you must keep the crook."

She spoke with conviction. The Abbot was quick to reply, "But you forget that my Abbot's crook turns inward, and our vision has ever been outward. So crying a need have I seen beyond the moat that I cannot let stagnant water longer bound my shepherdhood. I leave Thornton to help shepherd England's floundering poor. You cannot stand against that. You have preached the ideal, and I have followed you to your most distant March. Do you seek to turn me back now that I would turn your pagan frontier into God's good country?"

She was silent under his strong appeal, and her eye glistened, for he was greatly in earnest.

The Abbot continued, "This is the way of it. The villeins, and all our folk below the salt, toil and foment, but have no shepherds, none to lead, none to teach, none to inspire. The church that should teach and lead has only plundered, has joined the human wolves to tear flesh as well as to shear

wool! Why, look you! The very lands that are Thornton's foundation,—how got we them? The Conqueror snatched them from the Saxons whom his sword had driven into outlawry. He gave his ill-gotten gain to his rapacious Norman retainers, to pay them for having cut Saxon throats. The thrifty Normans, upon their decease, handed them over to the Church, to further the repose of their unquiet souls, and so we rob the living to pray for the dead! And now the Dean is hot to steal your lands! 'Tis hard to restrain him! I wonder not that the poor neither love us, nor trust us!

"But now comes the scholar of Oxenford," continued the Abbot with enthusiasm, "preaching like a voice in the wilderness. And verily he seems to be the only man in all England with a message for our distracted times. He says our lands may be taken again by those to whom they rightfully belong;—and the religious houses do not love him!—that we need not impoverish the land by paying foreign tax;—and both the popes have already damned him!—and, incidentally, that villeins need not pay the poll tax to the king;—and, of course, the Court will be a bitter enemy to him for that! His russet priests he sends out to instruct the poor, but most of them need instruction themselves. Now, I have knowledge, have seen the vision, have felt the bitter need, and forth from the cloister must I go to help old John Wyclif save the land and the church. He is a great man and a good, and he needs

strong men to help. You, of all women, will not say me nay! You cannot, you dare not say me nay!"

The Abbot was inspired by the greatness and the immediacy of his theme, and Heloise was so closely in sympathy with him that her spirit rose with his, and she caught his noble enthusiasm. Fears and tears passed, and she began to glory in the battle from afar. After all it was but the further fulfilment of her dreams.

Then her quick woman's sense perceived that his new freedom might endanger her exalted ideal for him. She read his eyes across the table. Weighing well her words, she said slowly and impressively, "You will not make your new doctrine an excuse to break the holy vows of priesthood, will you, Abbot Thomas?"

"N—o—o," he answered, the full force of her question sinking slowly, and withal, painfully into his mind. "No! I had not thought of that. Many of the Poor Priests are reputed to preach marriage for priests, and 'tis said some of them are wed. But Wyclif himself is celibate, and reports vary much as to his teaching on the subject, according to their source. I mistrust the Poor Preachers' enemies malign them. Most of Wyclif's priests keep their vows. No! A vow's a vow, and I shall keep mine, if grace sustain me. I do but exercise my vow upon a wider field."

His answer reassured her, and the sunshine came again into her face. Then the Abbot rose to go,

for it would soon be dark. They walked through the court yard and across the drawbridge together, he unfolding his plans.

Ralph Shepherd was in the tower, and as they passed, his eye rested upon them curiously. "By sonties," he exclaimed, to the bats and owls, "I fear me the gossips do but speak the truth. A maid and a monk! Bah!"

Just beyond the drawbridge Heloise stood watching the Abbot as he walked toward the Abbey. At the first bend in the road he turned, and she waved her hand to him in farewell. He threw his hands into the attitude of benediction, stood there a moment, then turned and passed out of her sight.

For a full minute she stood with head bent low, drinking in his blessing. Then she recrossed the bridge, spake "Good e'en" to Ralph at the windlass, passed on to her boudoir, and immediately rang for candles.

CHAPTER XII.
THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

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IN WHICH THE DEAN OF THORNTON PLAYS A HIGH STAKE, AND THE ABBOT CLEARS THE WAY FOR THE DEAN'S AMBITION BY LOSING THE GAME

Abbot Thomas hummed snatches of lively spring songs on his way from the Manor House to the Abbey. At the Gate House he was surprised to find the bridge up and the watch already set. He hallooed, and shortly the bridge came creaking down, and, passing over the moat he gave the porter his blessing. The west door of the Gate House was also closed and barred! What could it mean? The Abbot knocked loudly, and presently the postern opened, apparently of its own accord. He stepped into the enclosure wondering greatly why these extra precautions had been taken. It looked as though the Abbey were expecting an immediate attack. Such care in locking up had been unknown all the time he had been Abbot.

"Why are the gates closed so early? Are robbers about? Threatens the Green Devil the Abbey?" queried the Abbot sharply of whomever had opened the postern. But there was no one to answer! It was as though the postern had opened and closed itself! Moreover the garth was deserted, and not a foot-fall echoed in the cloisters. The Abbot was

slow to appreciate it—it was so far from his thoughts—but an air of the occult hung mysteriously about these unusual circumstances.

Abbot Thomas crossed the garth at a quick pace, and threaded the cloisters straight to his own house. The door was closed and bolted, and no lights shone through the lattices. Then did the Abbot note that all the Abbey was dark. Not a torch glimmered anywhere; not a person was astir. A desert could not be more uncannily silent and uninhabited. He felt distinctly annoyed, and vented part of his rising feeling upon the bell rope that hung by the door. Presently he heard the bolts withdraw, and when the massive door began to swing he caught the sibilant sound of suppressed whispers. He stepped into the hall of his own house, and behind him the door closed, apparently of its own accord. It was strange, but no sooner was the door closed than the bolts grated back into place. His own door was locked behind him! The mystery nettled the Abbot.

"Why this strange mummery?" he cried, his temper rising. "Bring lights immediately! Ho! John! Henry! Come at once with lights. Send St. John to me forthwith."

Instead of answer, out of the dark firm hands were laid upon his shoulders, and a muffled voice at his side said: "My lord the Abbot, you are under arrest. Make no noise. Resist not, and we will take you direct to your room where you will doubtless learn further of the matter."

"Arrest!" exclaimed the Abbot, surprise and bitterness mixed in his voice, "By whose orders, pray? And why?"

"All in due time," his captors remarked laconically. They hurried him through the hall to his own private sitting room. There a candle burned on the table, and the fire crackled cheerily on the hearth. He had just time to note in the light of the room that his captors were two, that they were masked, and that they were muffled from crown to sole, when they withdrew, and he heard them turn the key in the door.

The situation was not only annoying but it was getting serious. The Abbot tried the door leading to the parlor. It was bolted from the outside! Useless as he knew it to be, he tried the door by which the apparitors had brought him into the room. It, too, was barred. Had he not heard the key turn? He was a prisoner in his own house! Force of habit led him to ring the servant's bell which stood on the table. For long years that little bell had been master of the Abbey, but now its tones fell flat upon the tapestry on the wall. There came no answer, though the Abbot, in danger of losing his self-possession, rang the bell violently, again and again. Then he threw himself into a chair, and tried to calmly face and reason out the puzzling situation.

Something serious must have happened at the Abbey during the day. Probably his resignation had precipitated matters with the faction. What a

pity that he had spent the day at Barrowe. Had he been at the Abbey he might have guided affairs somewhat. At least he would have detected the enemy's moves, and might have been able to checkmate them. But why should they touch his personal liberty? There was a matter hard of solution. Instinctively he felt that Dean Fletcher was responsible for this queer turn of affairs. But why should the Dean be his enemy? The Abbot had intended that his resignation should quiet the feud and unite the Brotherhood. Probably the Brotherhood's feeling about his supposed relationship to Heloise was the reason for his arrest. But his absolute innocency relative to Heloise stopped him from taking that matter too seriously, even now. Investigation would prove the innocence of them both. The more he reviewed the situation the more calm he became, and the more certain of vindication for himself and his pupil.

Then came the disquieting thought;—would his own person bound the vengeance of his enemies? Would they not also attack Heloise? Innocence did not blind him to the horror of what that might possibly mean to his pupil's comfort. The Canons would surely blame her for his downfall! In their eyes, doubtless, he had fallen by reason of her having bewitched him! He would have laughed outright at the notion, it was so wide of the mark and exhibited such little knowledge of human nature, but for the uncomfortable fact that his helplessness made the situation too serious. While

he was bound, with what peril might not Heloise be besieged? The bare thought frenzied him, it was so intolerable. He rang the bell again, furiously, and again, and yet again, and he paced the floor in impotent anger.

At length the Abbot calmed himself, and sat down to meditate. Thanks be to the blessed saints, Heloise was no mere girl! Her wits were a match even for the Thornton Brotherhood! Moreover Sir William Wellham was powerful enough to protect his daughter against everything Dean Fletcher would be likely to stir against her. As for himself, in the end the Brotherhood would certainly accept his resignation, and he would be free to enter upon his campaign in behalf of England's poor. If the worst came, he would appeal to the Bishop. The very threat to use that weapon would drive the Dean to compromise. So completely did the Abbot feel master of the situation, and so enthusiastic was he in his plans for the future, that he was actually far a-field with Wyclif's campaign half an hour later when foot-falls in the corridor brought him back to the immediate situation.

The key grated harshly in the lock. When the door opened, his two apparitors looked upon the Abbot seated with unperturbed dignity, as though the situation was a mere incident of an every-day program. The Abbot's calmness surprised them. Deference to the compelling character of a good man as much as mere force of habit, led the two

men to bow themselves, and from his chair the Abbot genially gave them the regular blessing. The muffled mysteries beckoned him, and he arose to go.

"Whither? And why?" he inquired.

But the mutes only led the way. As he passed into the corridor, however, one of them whispered, "We go to learn the will of the Chapter. You have fallen upon dark days. But have courage, Brother, matters may mend."

The kindly message failed not in its purpose. It identified his pathway, and replaced uncertainty with certainty. He was to appear before the Chapter. Good! There he would vindicate himself! There personal friends would be seasonable salt among his enemies,—a healthful, restraining influence. There he would be done with these foolish mysteries, and would face his foes. A short cut out of his difficulties presented itself to him very attractively. He would make his resignation immediate! That would doubtless please the faction and promptly secure his release.

When the party reached the open air the Abbot was surprised to see that the Chapter House was not lighted. How remiss in their duties the brethren were to-day! His second surprise came when his guards passed the vestibule of the Chapter House, and, a few paces further on turned into the Chamber of Justice. A stone table stood across one end of the hall. Around the sides of the room, ran a finely carved stone bench, divided into sedilia by an arcade, providing seats for the Brotherhood

when justice was being dispensed. The Abbot's third surprise came as a distinct shock. The walls of the chamber were draped with black, from the ceiling down! However, the hall was empty. On the table two candles wasted their yellow beams upon the somber drapery of the room.

Though the black drapery of the hall chilled and sickened the Abbot, as it had been intended it should, the real significance of it did not immediately dawn upon him. Often had he administered simple justice in that room. He had never been obliged to fall back upon such drapings to impress the occasion with judicial solemnity. Dean Fletcher was certainly taking himself seriously! Evidently discipline henceforth would fall with a heavy hand in the Abbey government. It was easier to be a disciplinarian than it was to be a good man! These dark embellishments of simple justice Dean Fletcher had imported from Southern France. The Dean's elevation to the Abbacy would doubtless mean that the Abbey would be governed in the foreign spirit! So calm and so detached from the occasion was the Abbot that, he ruminated upon the fact, with a little more than a suspicion of pleasure that the new Abbot would find the English spirit stubbornly opposed to the introduction of these insignia of the foreign Inquisition. He fancied that this might be the very rock upon which the new administration would go to pieces! The Abbot as well as the Dean was made of flesh and blood!

Presently the door opened and three monks entered, wearing their cowls. Life-long habit threw the hands of the Abbot into the gesture of benediction, prisoner though he was, and the same rigor of habit inclined the heads of the three monks to receive the blessing, albeit they manifested some confusion in the simple act. The newcomers seated themselves on the sedilia about the table, and pushing back their cowls, they revealed themselves to be Dean Fletcher and the Brothers Geoffrey and Benedict. The Abbot's guards fell back to the door, then stepped outside the chamber. The Abbot summoned himself to supreme self-control in the presence of his enemies, upon what he instinctively felt was to be a decisive battle field.

"Why am I detained? And why these mummeries?" he demanded, throwing the questions directly at Dean Fletcher. That dignitary occupied his chair uneasily, and perforce must moisten his lips before he could make answer. Evidently, close quarters was trying to his nerves. At length, in a dry voice, whose tones cracked out from a parched mouth, he answered.

"I am to inform you, Thomas de Gretham, that the Chapter met this afternoon to consider the grave irregularities of your life this year past. I presented your resignation to the Brotherhood, in the hope that it might make further proceedings unnecessary."

The lie ought to have choked the Dean, but it did not! The Dean merely faltered a little, and cast

about for further words. When he had again moistened his lips he continued, "Instead of accepting your resignation, I am to tell you that the Chapter could do no other than count your parchment an indubitable evidence of your guilt, and therefore deposed you from the Abbacy."

The Abbot bowed gravely, a faint smile playing about the corners of his mouth, as though he saw through the Dean's play. The Dean continued.

"Your derelictions, and the public manner of your breaking your vows, were duly considered by the brethren, and passed upon. This Commission was appointed to hear such defense as you may wish to make, and to award you such penance as the gravity of your offense may call for. Have you aught to say, Father Thomas?"

The omission of his title was not lost upon the Abbot. But he had himself well in hand. He merely asked, casually, "With what am I charged?"

"With miscomportment towards the woman Heloise," almost hissed the Dean, nettled by the Abbot's coolness. Then he added, more mildly, "and with relaxing the discipline of the Abbey to the point of ruin, as a direct result of your entanglement with that woman. You are charged with breaking the vows of priesthood, and with seeking to slip back into the wicked world and to enter matrimony—all this to the great scandal of the Brotherhood and the Church. What say you, Father Thomas?"

The Abbot's defense counted for nothing. An

appeal to the Bishop's court brought a sickly smile to the face of Dean Fletcher. The Dean knew a better way, and a quicker; moreover, one more certain and effective! The Abbot told the simple truth about his relationship to Heloise. The transparency of his story, the simplicity and directness of his appeal against arbitrary injustice, the lofty aim of the ambition he avowed to serve the poor of the lanes and hedges, appeared to make an impression on Geoffrey and Benedict. But the president of the Commission set his jaws the more firmly, and at length cut the Abbot short with, "Is this all you have to say? Against your mere words are innumerable facts known indubitably to us all. With mine own eyes saw I the woman Heloise reclining in your arms upon the couch in the Oak Room at the Manor House in August last! Fie on you! The laxity of your morals hath well nigh ruined the good name of the Abbey! It is my duty forthwith to pass sentence upon you."

The Abbot would have spoken again, but the Judges arose, and Dean Fletcher overbore him to silence. "Thomas de Gretham," said he, in fine solemn, judicial tones, "You are duly deposed from the Abbacy, as I said, and a minute to that effect is spread upon the records of the House. For the good of your soul you are sentenced to do the penance of solitary confinement in your own room, until you come to a better frame of mind, and do report personally to the Chapter that you will

amend your ways and will reaffirm and maintain your priestly vows."

"Convey Thomas de Gretham to his chamber," he commanded. Brother Geoffrey brought in the guards. "We will accompany you," the Dean remarked when the guards had the prisoner again in charge.

The Dean's face was ashy white, and his companions were in a flutter of excitement. It was no small thing to condemn a superior arbitrarily. Moreover, the procedure was grossly irregular. A day of reckoning might be nigh!

The Judges passed first out of the hall, and the guards followed with their prisoner. The strange procession recrossed the cloister garth. There was still no sign of life about the Abbey, and the enclosure was dark—all but the Abbot's House, which was now well lighted, and the front door stood wide open! The Abbot opened his eyes wide as he approached his illuminated quarters. What was happening had evidently been carefully planned. When the party had passed into the hall of the Abbot's house, Brother Benedict stepped back, and locked and bolted the door!

The hall terminated in a long corridor. On the right of the hall the door of the Abbot's parlor stood ajar. Down the corridor on the right showed the door of the Abbot's sitting-room, and a little further down, also to the right, was the door of the Abbot's bedroom. A door between the parlor and sitting-room admitted of communication be-

tween those two apartments. But there was no door to the bedroom except the one opening into the corridor. On the left of the corridor were closed doors leading to the Abbot's dining-room and kitchen.

The Abbot paused at the door of the sitting-room half way down the corridor, that being the room in which he had been confined earlier in the evening. Thereat Dean Fletcher shrugged his shoulders, and said simply, "No; the bedroom! Father Thomas will need the bed!"

The procession moved a few paces further to the bedroom door, which stood wide open. A candle burning on a stand dimly outlined the contents of the room,—the bed in the corner; a wash-stand with a pitcher of water, an ewer standing on the floor close by the stand; a small desk-table with shelves underneath bulging with books; a credence shelf at the back of the table on which glistened a gilded crucifix, by the base of which lay the Abbot's breviary; a table on which stood the candlestick; also two oaken chairs and a footstool. Dark tapestry draped the walls, figured with biblical scenes. A bird fluttered about the room in evident distress. Probably it had gained access by the narrow splay window near the ceiling, some fifteen or twenty feet above the floor.

The party halted at the bedroom door, and Dean Fletcher motioned the Abbot to pass in, himself and party staying outside in the hall. Nothing loth, the Abbot crossed the threshhold. He was

tired of this foolish mummery and was glad of an opportunity to be alone. To one who had fasted and prayed much, the prospect of a few hours, or even a few days, of solitary confinement not only had no terrors, but actually possessed some measure of attraction, especially when no stain of sin or wrong would make the hours bitter. Moreover, no place for penance could have suited him better than his own room. There were his books, he had his breviary, and the crucifix would be before his eyes till the term of his penance was ended.

As the Abbot passed into the room he said to Dean Fletcher, "My man John may bring me food and water on the morrow."

It was a gentle command, and was very characteristic of the Abbot. The Dean muttered something which was understood to be, "All in good time; we will attend to your needs as you may make them known."

The Dean motioned the guards, and they departed.

A sense of the unusual possessed the Abbot in his own room. The atmosphere seemed strangely close. It was tainted with an odor with which the new masonry of the church had familiarized him, but which just now the Abbot did not identify. So familiar was he with the room that he did not need the dim light of the flickering candle to find his way about. He stepped across to the large window at the foot of the bed, from which a thousand times he had enjoyed the scene of the open

area before the old Gate House, to throw open the casement for fresh air. When he stretched out his hand in the dusk, it came into contact with solid masonry! The window had been bricked up solid, flush with the wall! It was the odor of green masonry that had prompted the Abbot to move for fresh air.

On a motion from the Dean, Brother Geoffrey closed the door upon the Abbot. The heavy door swung but slowly. At a creak of its hinges the Abbot turned quickly, and sprang toward the closing door, his face white, his eyes bulging with wild, sudden terror. But he was too late. *The door of his tomb was shut forever.*

Dean Fletcher himself had the key half turned in the lock when the Abbot's body struck the door. The Dean's skinny face lighted evilly with a strange mixture of triumph and fear. In excited answer to the Abbot's awful pounding on the door he hissed through his clenched teeth, "Ha! Ha! We have you now, my fine bird! The hen must thrive a while without the cock!—until in person, you do bring the Chapter word of your repentance! By Saint Satan, 'tis a most rare sentence!"

The fiend danced a hornpipe in the corridor to the awful pounding on the door from within. Geoffrey and Benedict looked on the Dean with amazement. They deafened their ears with their fingers against the man-sledge on the door, and turned to flee down the corridor.

His companions' action brought the Dean to

himself. He threw himself across their way. "'Tis not done yet!" he cried. "Not yet!"

He stepped across the corridor. Unlocking the kitchen door he spoke with sharp authority the one word "Come!" In response, the two lay brothers who would become novices, stepped into the hall, supposing what they did to be a test of their obedience to the order they would join. The Dean set them to work to brick up the door as they had earlier bricked up the window in the Abbot's bedroom. The Dean's own impatient hands laid some of the stone. The frenzied knocking upon the door from within while the wall arose, course by course, only spurred the Dean to fiercer haste.

When the last brick was laid and the last course pointed, the Dean had the men clear the debris from the corridor, sweep the floor clean, and, finally, scrub away all traces of the night's dark deed. Then he dismissed the masons at the outside kitchen door with a needless final objurgation to secrecy, locked the door behind them and hung the key upon his girdle.

" 'Tis a good job well done!" exclaimed the Dean, rubbing his hands together in glee. He put his ear to the new wall and listened. Not a sound came from the Abbot's tomb. All was as silent as though the Abbot were already dead.

"The woman ought not to escape," muttered the Dean, as, having locked the front door of the Abbot's house, with his companions he passed out into the night.

CHAPTER XIII. THE KEELBY WITCH

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IN WHICH THE SUPERNATURAL TAKES A HAND IN THE GAME, AND IT BECOMES APPARENT THAT THERE ARE MORE THINGS IN HEAVEN AND EARTH THAN ARE DREAMED OF IN OUR PHILOSOPHY

No one knew of the Abbot's immuration except Dean Fletcher and Brothers Geoffrey and Benedict. Before they could surmise the awful nature of the sentence he had devised for the Abbot, the Dean had dismissed the guards, so that they were as ignorant of the Abbot's fate as the rest of the Abbey. The two masons never dreamed at the time, that they had walled up a living man in a tomb. They supposed that the clamor beyond the door was a mere stage property, devised to test their nerve and obedience. On the morrow every monk in the Abbey knew that the Abbot had ingeniously evaded both the issue and the sentence by starting during the night for France. The Abbot had fled!

A little while before tierce Dean Fletcher passed through an excited group gathered about the fountain. The monks pressed about him for the latest information about the Abbot's flight.

"It looks like acknowledgment of guilt," he said, in an even, judicial tone, as though he were reluc-

tant to touch upon so painful a subject. "'Tis verily too bad. Abbot Thomas was a good man. I doubt that we shall ever see him again. Let us think lenientlỳ of his failings. At tierce will I speak more fully."

The day after the immuration Heloise missed the Abbot, but thought little of it. Matters incident to his resignation doubtless absorbed his attention and detained him within the walls. Their reading of a Wyclif pamphlet could wait until tomorrow. When tomorrow's sun had set and the Abbot came not, Heloise experienced some little uneasiness, though she could not have analyzed or explained her feeling. When several days brought no word from her tutor, Heloise began to be alarmed. Surely the Abbot might have sent her word why he was detained! But she understood enough of affairs within the Abbey to feel that the Abbot's absence might be a serious matter, and that it would bear investigation.

Apparently, however, there was no cause for alarm. The tide of Abbey life flowed back and forth past the Manor House exactly as she had seen it ebb and flow since childhood. A-field she met the monks as aforetime, and naught about them was unusual, unless it were that, to her new suspicion, they seemed a little more reluctant to enter into conversation, and held themselves somewhat more aloof from the world. The canonical hours pealed from the tower as of yore. Several times she spoke with Dean Fletcher, but she could

not bring herself to seek information of him, though he was very affable, and she did not doubt in the least that he would give her what information she needed, could she bring herself to question him. It seemed at times, as though St. John avoided her. It was several days before she could meet him. When at length the opportunity came to question St. John, his answers seemed evasive. She gathered from him that the Dean ruled the Abbey, and that discipline was more strict than heretofore. The Brethren were forbidden henceforth to talk with the outside world. St. John could not guess why the Abbot had left the Abbey. It was very strange that he had left no word with him. When he heard from the Abbot he would communicate with her.

One day Heloise mentioned the subject of the Abbot's absence to her father. Sir William thought lightly of the matter. But, happening to meet the Dean the next day, he broached the subject. Dean Fletcher was frankness itself! He explained the situation at the Abbey very fully. Sir William was astounded. At dinner next day he reported the information Dean Fletcher had imparted. It seemed that Abbot Thomas had recently surprised the Brotherhood with his resignation. He was weary of the stress of office, he had said. It appeared that he had queer notions about joining Wyclif's harebrained campaign for the poor. As in duty bound, the Brotherhood had met to consider the situation, and had been obliged, though with

great reluctance, to accept the Abbot's resignation.

That document, however, the Dean was careful to explain, had provided that it was not to go into effect until the first day of July, and the Brotherhood had felt certain that they would enjoy the Abbot's rule until that date. Imagine, therefore, their surprise when the very next day the Abbot had unaccountably disappeared, and had left behind him not a trace of whither he had gone, nor an indication of when he would be back. Some said he had gone to France; others said to Germany. But the Dean did not know. The Chapter could do nothing until the resignation should go into effect, when steps would be reluctantly taken to elect a new Abbot. In the meanwhile the Brotherhood was sorely perplexed. The Dean was afraid they might be obliged to invoke the aid of the civil arm to discover the whereabouts of their Abbot. It really bordered on mystery, and Dean Fletcher was greatly concerned, but, in good cheer, he hoped for the best.

Within herself Heloise fought a great battle these days. The Dean's explanation left her more suspicious than ever. But what could she do? To whom could she go for help or counsel? None of the ordinary sources of help were open to her, because in order to use them, she would be obliged to acknowledge and to discuss, in some degree, her unique relationship with the Abbot. From this her maidenly instincts shrank.

There was, however, one quarter whence she could obtain help, were she brave enough to make the venture. Could she bring herself to make the appeal, ghostly counsel certainly would not fail. The air teemed with sprites who made or marred human fortune. Priests daily dealt with the canonical section of this ghostly realm. Beyond the supernatural power utilized by the priest, lay a dim extra-canonical realm, open and ready for whomever dare appropriate its strange illicit power. The world of Black Art would reveal the fate or fortune of her tutor. True, its magic was under ban! But nevertheless it did thrive! Was it not, indeed, under ban because it was a potent, and, indeed, a successful rival to the Church? Still she might stain her soul in the unlawful appeal? Nothing ventured, however, nothing gained! For the sake of the sacred friendship she bore to the man who had so mysteriously disappeared, she would trip adown the inviting, dangerous forbidden path. She would visit the Keelby witch. Forthwith she called sturdy Martin Reeve, and bade him prepare for the journey.

Early on the morrow Heloise set out toward Keelby, not without strange misgivings. Honest Martin Reeve rode close behind, his bow strung and hanging aslant his broad back, his quiver bristling with yard-long shafts. But, truly, she hardly needed an escort this June day. The forest was very quiet. The villeinage toiled in the fields, and the kindly daylight had driven the wild life

of the woods to cover. She would have been safe riding the forest alone through this idyllic summertime.

Not until they approached Roxton wood did Heloise acquaint Martin with their destination. The old man grunted a burlesque protest, and a droll quizzical what-next expression played among the wrinkles and scars of his face, till Heloise could not restrain a smile. He crossed himself superstitiously, mumbled a doubtful paternoster or two, and declared he would follow a Wellham anywhere, witch or no witch, devil or no devil, live or die. Nor did he doubt that they would get through scatheless, though the witch were a foulsome wench, and the mouth of the Pit were not far away!

When they rode into the glen they espied the witch approaching her cot from the forest. On her arm she carried a basket of herbs, and Heloise inferred that she had been a-field replenishing her stock of simples. Truth to tell, the inference was somewhat aside from the truth. The witch was returning from escorting her latest client upon his way. Early that morning she had admitted to her cot a tall monk who wore the Austin habit. The cauldron in the cot had bubbled, and the witch had uttered weird incantations. About the priest she had woven a grewsome web of mystery, out of which she had extracted uncouth cabalistic wisdom. When the monk had left earlier in the day, strange to say, the witch had accompanied him into the

forest. There had been none to see the witch's uncanonical entertainment of the monk, therefore there had been none to condemn.

"Welcome to Roxton," exclaimed the witch in a voice of peculiar penetrating power, eying her visitors narrowly under cover of a mask of carelessness. "How left you Thornton,—Village, Abbey, and Manor House? Walk in, Mistress Heloise! Nay, you need not fear! Your doughty chap may stay by the horses. They will be likelier to be there when you want them!" she added with a chuckle, as she pulled the latch-string and threw wide open the door of her hovel.

The woman's display of knowledge awed Heloise, as, indeed, it was intended. Glancing into her face Heloise surmised that the witch must be younger than she chose to appear. Her queer conventional witch's trappings failed to make her seem really old, wrinkled, weatherbeaten, disreputable. It was a pair of sharp, black, intelligent eyes that peeped out mischievously from under her black conical hat, as she moved toward the house. To avoid a boggy place in the road she lifted her skirts in a dainty manner, suggesting social graces seldom associated with witches.

Heloise followed the witch into the hovel,—a squat structure with low stucco walls,—its roof heavy with accumulated thatch, and green with voluntary vegetation. A couple of small dormer lattices shed a modicum of light over the interior. Above the lintel had been rudely painted a penta-

gram in red, and the crude artist had arranged about the cabalistic figure five mystic signs of the zodiac.

The interior of the hovel was invested in gloom. Not until Heloise had been indoors awhile could she distinguish her surroundings. Then she drew back in horror, and would have fled to the open, but for the fact that the door was shut. Close by the door lay a full grown wolf, alert, watchful, showing his savage fangs, and bristling as though about to attack.

"Down, Satan, down sir!" the witch commanded, her voice authority itself. The beast dropped his sharp nose between his paws, and apparently fell asleep. Only then did Heloise glance about the room. A huge white owl perched on the tall back of a chair by the dingy hearth, blinked ponderous wisdom. In the ingle nook hung a withered heart that once had beaten in a human breast. Cold chills ran down Heloise's spine when she noted that the heart was stuck full of stout clumsy pins, as though it were the witch's pincushion. Over the fireplace was stretched the dark leathery body of a bat, pinned tightly to the wall. Heloise shuddered, the place was so suggestive, so uncanny. She drew back close to the wall. The putting of her hand to the wall for support loosed a festoon of snake skins which swung full into her face, whereat she uttered an involuntary little scream.

"Afraid!" queried the witch, lightly.

"N—o," answered Heloise, dubiously. Then

she plucked up courage, and, standing erect, answered emphatically, "No," with a little laugh. Seizing the swinging skins, she jerked them from the rafter to the floor at her feet.

"A brave woman!" exclaimed the witch. "A Wellham, from crown to toe! By sonties! You would make a fine witch!"

The witch picked up the skins and laid them on a table by the wall. She motioned Heloise to a chair, and seated herself on a stool before her.

"You want to tell me of your love, and you seek advice," said the witch. "I know! O! I know! Well, Missy, have no fear. The old can always help the young! None so well as I! None so well as I," and she chuckled to herself, swaying to and fro upon the stool.

"Yea, Mother, I do need help, and have broken rule to come to you. What say the Fates?" queried Heloise.

"Let me see your hand. Ah!" The witch's eyes gleamed at the glint of the gold with which Heloise crossed her palm. Then she took the hand, and pressed over its surface firmly with the tips of her fingers, examining it closely and in detail.

"A good hand and a true, my sweet lady," she exclaimed. Then she fell to reading the lines, in broken, abrupt sentences.

"Mount Jupiter—ambition: pride! Beware! Apollo,—furrows: art, crossed with difficulty and danger. You will have trouble: plenty of trouble! Mercury,—ah! lady! You should have taken to

herbs! Hypocrates' greatest is yours, dear lady, merely for the asking. Venus,—now, that is strange! A fine, firm mount; but strangely crossed! You have a great love, and a marvelous trouble, my dear. Why! stranger still! Never saw I such a hand! Here is Mars, potent and aggressive, aye, and victorious too! Why, then, you will win through. Good cheer, good cheer, fair lady!"

"Here are the lines," she continued after a pause, puckering her brows and scrutinizing the palm. "The heart line, deep and strong. That is constancy. Good! But the line is, O! so crossed! An unusual love brings unusual trouble, my dear! Trouble! Trouble! Verily you need witch's help! I'll help, never fear! Line of life—deep, and firm, and long, but crossed towards the center. Long life, many sorrows this side midway, but a glorious setting of the sun! Line of fate! Well; Well! The fates be strong against you, also wonderfully strong for you! Obstacles ominous lie athwart your path, but you are destined to overcome them all. Courage, dear lady. Courage, I say, courage!"

Heloise was strangely impressed. The witch's voice, so calm, so penetrating, so instinct with both command and persuasion, felt familiar as a memory to her, and she yielded to its spiritual power. Her heart beat fast, and she caught quick breath. These cabalistic sentences spoke out part of her private experience. The witch's fascinat-

ing glittering eye, the strange manner of her speech, the uncanny decorations of the dimly lighted room, all combined to impress her with an overbearing sense of the supernatural. She felt herself upon the verge of the spirit world. What might there not be just beyond to hear and see! Curiosity, combined with her hope to hear something of the lost Abbot, led her on still further into the deepening mystery.

"Tell me of the future, Mother. Of mine,—and, of his," she added, and caught a quick breath. Then she withdrew her hand, and sprang from the chair on which she had been sitting. For from beneath the witch's stool a large viper glided. The loathsome reptile raised itself from the floor to the witch's lap, and glided to a hiding-place in the folds of her gown. The witch laughed outright at Heloise's perturbation, nor did she reassure her client when she drew from her pocket an ugly toad, and fondled it upon her knee.

"Have no fear, Missy. My serpent proffereth you wisdom and great subtlety, and you may yet need the toad's jewel! The fates are for you, my lady. And you would spy the future, say you? Well, follow me."

The toad she put into her pocket, and she hung the snake about her neck, as she walked to the further end of the cabin. She passed through the folds of a curtain, holding them apart for Heloise. When the curtain dropped behind her Heloise could feel the darkness. Presently, however, a pale,

unearthly, blue light flickered dim and low in a brazier, which was supported in the top of a small iron tripod. The witch threw a handful of powder on the flame and it leapt up, still unearthly blue, suggesting to Heloise a light from the nether regions. The room filled with a heavy soporific odor.

The flickering light in the brazier served to dimly reveal the room. On either hand the room seemed to be a narrow corridor, down which hundreds of tiny lights flickered dimly in braziers lost in the distance.

Immediately in front of Heloise a human head grinned from a shelf in the corner, its skin drawn tight over its face, dry and tawny like the skin of a mummy. Over the skinny head hung by the wrist a horrid human hand, its fingers drawn and knotty, and spread apart, like an eagle's claws. Heloise had just time to note these hideous details when the light in the brazier died away, and darkness once more settled upon the apartment. Then Heloise felt the witch's hand soft and stealthy upon her arm. She shuddered through and through, thinking of the hand that hung above the horrid head, wondering where the slimy snake might be.

"Have a look into the magic mirror, my dear," croned the witch in a low sleepy tone, close by her side. Presently Heloise became conscious that a shiny and disc-like something floated dimly, uncertainly, before her eyes. She put forth her hand to steady whatever it might be. The witch seized

her wrist, and held it tight. Under her breath she hissed in Heloise's ear.

"Touch not, Gentile, or you break the spell!" A moment later the witch had calmed. In a sleepy, croony tone she spake. "Look you, Missy! Look you! Look you well!"

A strange mirror had shaped itself in the darkness. Its bright surface trembled mid air, before Heloise's eyes, supported on nothing. Strangely stirred, expecting she knew not what, and half dreading what she might see, Heloise searched the magic mirror. She was excited. Her vision was confused. In the far-away dreamy tone of a clairvoyant the witch chanted low in Heloise's ear:

"Dim dawns a house—a religious house—walled, moated. Brethren walk cloisters! They are greatly disturbed! They gather to discuss.—A monk is absent; lost; cannot be found.—Someone swears Brethren secret, by a great oath.—The Abbot, the Abbot! But strange! I cannot see.—Venus clouds with mystery the mount of Mars!"

The witch made a gesture of impatience, then turned again intently to the mirror. Heloise trembled from head to foot. To be so near and yet to fail! To have the vision dim just as it was coming clearly into sight! Far worse was that than to have received no hint at all. She turned eagerly to the witch, crying out, "O, cannot you read more, Mother? Look again! Look hard! What is it that comes so dimly now? Read for me quick! Read! O, please, read!"

The witch swayed over the mirror, and in measured cadences she chanted, "Monks stringing bows, feathering shafts!—The mad rush of war!—Men lie slain!—The house is besieged!—They storm! They storm!—They are hurled back!—Again they come!—Again!—Eagles and wolves!—Wolves and eagles!—The awful stench of the slain!—The stalking pestilence of death!"

The witch seemed to be possessed by her vision. Her voice rose and fell with the strange events she pictured, and her hands moved in wild distorted gestures.

Heloise was almost beside herself. "The Abbot, the Abbot, Mother! O, tell me of him. Is he dead?" she cried sinking from the stool to her knees on the floor, as though to pray the witch for the vision that would not fully come.

The witch turned toward her, strange questioning and perplexity in her voice, as though she did not quite understand. "The Abbot? The Abbot? Abbot?" she drawled sleepily. "He loves only the People's Cause. But,—the—Dean—the Dean hath him on the hip! Beware!"

Heloise swooned at the foot of the tripod. When she regained consciousness she was reclining in the witch's warm arms on a bench in the open before the cottage. Martin Reeve was standing by, puzzled as much by the witch's mysterious crooning over his mistress as by his mistress's strange sickness, knowing not what to do, nor how to take this queer turn of affairs. The witch bid him speed to

the stream with a bucket for water. When he returned his mistress was herself again, and the witch was urging refreshments upon her, which she deftly declined. She and Martin would ride down to the Keelby inn for dinner, then through the woods homeward in the afternoon.

While Martin was getting the horses, Heloise questioned the witch. "Can you tell me where the lost Abbot may be found? I think the mirror was about to tell, when I swooned like a silly sickly girl. I came to learn the Abbot's fate. Tell me what you know, Mother mine."

The witch's eyes twinkled, then she made answer, "Mark me well what I say, and follow the oracle's advice:

> When you're building fortune up against fate,
> Consult an architect ere it be too late."

Martin came with the horses. He helped Heloise to the saddle, and they rode toward Keelby. They had walked their horses briskly quarter of a mile or so when the witch, whom they had just left at her door, met them in the way! She made way for them, and courtesied to Heloise as they passed, throwing Martin a grimace that caused that worthy to shrug his shoulders. Then, with a ring in her voice that echoed through the forest, she turned and shouted after them, "Don't forget the architect, my dear. The other man will bear watching!"

The tone and quality of the witch's voice, puckered Heloise's brow. It seemed so familiar. "Ha!"

she exclaimed, turning to Martin. "That's the voice that stirred the monks the day of the dedication!"

Old Martin scratched his head, his face lighted, and he grinned from ear to ear as he said, "By Saint Julian, verily it seems to be so!"

CHAPTER IV. HELOISE

CHAPTER XIV

HELOISE

WHICH CLEARLY SETS FORTH THE GREAT DIFFICULTY OF MAKING UP ONE'S MIND, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE ADVICE TO BE FOLLOWED IS THAT OF A FOULSOME WITCH UNDER BAN

Shortly after her visit to the Keelby witch, Heloise loitered in the garden at the Manor House. It was the charming hour of twilight, and the balmy odor of summer floated on the stilly air. Save for a few fleecy clouds that hung lazily above, the sky was blue and clear. The clouds hung no more white and fluffy overhead than they lay reflected in the fountain by which Heloise sat. So quiet was it that rabbits nibbled fearlessly from cover to cover at the bottom of the garden. Lengthening shadows, forerunners of night not far away, lay aslant the garden, the house, and the wood. Birds twittered in the bushes, and a cloud of tardy bees hummed about the hives. From a distance came the call of a fox, which promptly met its challenge from the dogs at the Manor House, whereupon the rabbits bobbed their white tails as they scampered to cover. Then all was still.

"The world is keyed to fear," Heloise mused. "Tooth and claw are the rule of life. But there is no cover for hunted folk!"

Heloise was weary. The bitterness that accompanies the sense of defeat rankled in her mind. Near three weeks had passed since the disappearance of the Abbot. The mystery that had suddenly engulfed him weighed heavily upon her mind. But she was still totally in the dark as to what had in reality happened. Her visit to the Keelby witch did but further perplex her. Singularly enough, though she did not note the fact at the time, she did not now look upon the Abbot as her lover, though her feeling for him was the same as when she first awoke to the thrill of it. It was the man—the teacher—the great, good, strong soul in trouble, that absorbed her attention these days. He was fighting a great battle, she felt, the nature of which she could not divine, but she wanted to be his effective ally.

Heloise had no knowledge upon which to act. However, the intuitions of the woman were alert. Straight as a bloodhound on the trail she took up the scent, and halted not till, full cry, she mentally brought up at Dean Fletcher's door. She could not tell why she held the Dean responsible for the Abbot's disappearance, nor how it came about that she felt that serious guilt attached to his part in the mystery. But she kept her eye on the Dean's lank, bent figure, and thin face, feeling that, somehow, there lay the solution to the mystery. She was quite sure that there had been crookedness of some sort, and she set her woman's wit to work to find out exactly what had happened. Happily

the thought that her tutor was actually dead, did not cross her mind. She imagined that a few day's investigation would discover to his friends his whereabouts and would restore him to his duties. Perhaps he would shortly get a message to her from France, whither the monks explained he had gone.

The garden gate clicked. Presently the Dwarf who was evidently looking for somebody, came down the walk. When he saw Heloise he doffed his cap and immediately advanced toward her.

"I was looking for you, Mistress Heloise," he said in his droll drawl, bowing low as he spoke.

"I, too, wished for you, Henry," she said, smiling at the whimsical creature, who, seating himself on the lip of the basin, had pretended to lose his balance backward, saving himself by a grotesque effort. Then she added: "You'll drown yet!"

The Dwarf retorted, "I'm whale!"

"Have you Abbey news?" asked Heloise.

"Aye! Surely I have! Dean Fletcher *has* the stolen will! I was not mistaken when I told you so before. The Dean has the will! Last night I overheard him again in conference with oily Brother Geoffrey." Heloise could but smile at the scorn the queer fellow put into his voice. "The Dean said that as soon as he was Abbot he would launch the will upon the courts. Then would the Manor lands belong to the Abbey, and you would be turned out. He mentioned you by name, Mistress Heloise. He's in a towering rage at you."

Heloise shuddered, and fell into meditation.

More to herself than to the Dwarf she said, "It matters little about land. Land's cold, dead stuff. Only men count. Scrivener says his plan will checkmate the Dean in court. Possession, too, is nine-tenths of the law! Scrivener opines that the lawyers' tournament about the land will not be yet awhile. More important matters press immediately. Rent is a toll which the 'Haves' impose upon the 'Have nots.' I suppose we could live and pay rent!—Many do! Meanwhile,"—and she addressed the Dwarf directly,—"Have you news of Abbot Thomas?"

The Dwarf shook his head. "No news of the Abbot's to be had," he answered, with the air of one whose every search had ended against a blind wall. Then he continued, "The Dean's Abbot-Elect, say the monks. I know not what date was his election! He's to be installed by and by! St. John says he rules well. He's bringing the house back to the rubric! That's something good to eat, I think! Brother Geoffrey says the monks have never been held so strictly to the rule! Brother Paul told me that the Bishop favors Dean Fletcher for Abbot. O, there'll be big doings in the Abbey pretty soon!—like when they dedicated the church, and the Voice ripped the monks up the back till you could see beyond their shirts!"

Heloise smiled, and asked, quietly, "What says the Abbey of Abbot Thomas? Hear you aught of that?"

"Aye! That he was a bad man under his hide!

They say he deserted them most disgracefully! The shepherd left his sheep to the wolves in the wilderness! He cares for Wyclif more than for the Church! He is one of Wyclif's Poor Preachers now! Brother Geoffrey saw him preaching in the Lincoln Bull Ring after the baiting last week. I'd rather see the baiting any time than hear even myself preach! Dean Fletcher told me that if the villeins rise, Abbot Thomas will likely be at their head, he's so foolish about the poor! O, I tell you, the Dean is sorely vexed because the Abbot deserted! If Abbot Thomas ever shows his head again, it will go hard with him at the Abbey. Ha! Ha!"

The Dwarf was convulsed with a fit of laughter. His levity vexed Heloise, and she spoke his name sharply. He sobered at once, a comical, rueful look coming over his face. Plunging his hand into his bosom he produced a scrap of parchment. "Pardon, lady," he said, "I had well nigh forgotten. The Keelby witch made me her post. Here's her billet. The foulsome beldame made me bring it!"

Heloise took the scrip and read the following, written in a scholar's neat hand,

> "When you're building fortune up against fate,
> Consult an architect ere it be too late."

Heloise was surprised. The effect was so vivid that the parchment seemed to be the witch herself. Heloise could hear the witch's voice, so vivid was the impression. Instinctively she put up her hand

to fend off the supernatural. She had not taken the witch's oracle very seriously that morning at Keelby, but now it seemed to be both an open door and a finger pointing the way. "You may go," she said to the Dwarf. "Keep watch on the Abbey, and bring me word."

The Dwarf had not reached the gate when Heloise called him back, saying, "If you see Guilbert de Rouen at the house this eve, tell him privately that Mistress Heloise walks in the garden."

The Dwarf departed, a knowing smile playing about his solemn face. Heloise mused, for the witch's oracle planted Guilbert de Rouen squarely in her mind. Why should she not appeal to him? Their friendship was unquestionable. Since she had said, "No," to him when he came on his quest a year ago, he had been a constant visitor at the Manor House, and Heloise had led the household in making him welcome. Her interest in Guilbert was both intellectual and social. His intellect quickened her mind, and her social nature expanded under the warmth of his presence.

Just now Heloise dwelt appreciatively on Guilbert's career. Born in a French nobleman's family, revenues from some of his ancestral estates already fat in his purse, he scorned to live the life of a mere nobleman. Certain queer notions of his about holding his fiefs for the betterment of the poor, greatly appealed to Heloise. She knew that the call of the wider world had deflected Guilbert from the church. Otherwise he might now have been a

tonsured monk. For some reason Heloise was glad he was not a monk! A growing life had pushed aside his tonsured teachers. Books and travel, contact with the great world and companionship with men of affairs, had changed his course of life. Nature had endowed Guilbert with a constructive mind. The promising youth followed art, became an architect, and finally a cathedral builder. From Rouen he had taken groups of artists with him, and all over Europe many a dream in stone witnessed to his unconventional genius.

But in this crisis could Heloise appeal to Guilbert de Rouen? The matter was perplexing. Truth to tell, Guilbert's illuminated text occupied a place of honor towards the top among the Boudoir divinities where Heloise dreamed and slept. Its art easily won for it that high place. But quite often Heloise scanned the text, which was but a poor, halting poem at best! In a certain way, though Heloise was unconscious of the fact, Guilbert had come to wield an influence in her life almost as vital as that enjoyed by the Abbot. Her soul was large enough to be hungry for both influences to round out her life, and too large to be fretted by the incongruity involved, had she been conscious of it. The Abbot fired one hemisphere of her being, Guilbert illuminated the other.

As she mused by the fountain, Heloise warmed toward Guilbert de Rouen under the memory of the happy times they had spent together. On the portico, or in the garden during summer; or, in

winter time, ensconced in the deep recess of a lattice indoors, they had been most pleasantly associated. The architect's stories of his travels had unfolded Europe till it lay in her mind like a map—its teeming cities, its men of court, castle, and church, its heroes of sword and of pen. It was good to see the Alps through Guilbert's eyes, a rich experience to walk the vineyards of Italy and see imperial Rome with him for guide. Perhaps this very intimacy made it more difficult for Heloise to obey the oracle.

A subtle indefinable change had gradually come over Heloise's feeling towards the Abbot. She loved him not less, these days, but more, though slightly differently, than when in the oak room love first awoke so suddenly. Experience had brought discrimination into her sentiment. She had discovered that, even among its higher ideals, life is a patchwork. A subtle dislike for the Abbot's frock often stole into her mind. Though he had worn the gown when he had won her love, in her eyes he did not look well in it these days! Yet she would not have unfrocked him for worlds! But, if he had not been a monk! Long before the Abbot had sighed for the larger world Heloise had felt the cramp of the Abbey walls upon his soul. Yet she was loath to have him cross the moat for the freedom of the outside world. Conflicting ideals fought for mastery in her mind. The great, holy sanctions of the church were incarnated in the Abbot, and they drew her utmost love out to him

magnificently. But still her love for Abbot Thomas left her dissatisfied. Plato was cold, distant, and vaguely seemed lacking some essential quality of life.

Could Heloise appeal to Guilbert de Rouen in behalf of the Abbot?—that was the question that absorbed her by the fountain. Her attitude toward Guilbert had not consciously changed. Why not fulfil the Keelby oracle! Guilbert and she were still close friends. She knew him through and through, she trusted him, and he was certainly deeply interested in her welfare. Moreover, she had great confidence in his world-wise judgment. With a painful little twinge she remembered his plea, that he might continue in her service, even though he could not win her love. In the garden she had given her assent. Why not live up to her promise? Guilbert was on terms of intimacy within the Abbey, and, doubtless, had access to information no one else, outside the Brotherhood, could reach. If legal processes should be needed, Guilbert would know how to set the wheels of the law in motion. But, naturally, Heloise shrank from appealing to a rejected lover in behalf of a man who in a real, though not an absolute sense, was his successful rival.

A whole hour Heloise fought this strange battle, endeavoring to hold the scales even between these two men and herself. Then the sense of justice, and of pity for a man in distress, a man, moreover, whom she loved, overcame the barriers her maidenly

instinct reared against such an appeal. She would ask Guilbert's advice in the matter, perhaps this very evening.

The garden gate creaked on its hinges, and Heloise heard a footfall on the walk.

CHAPTER XV. GUILBERT DE ROUEN

CHAPTER XV

GUILBERT DE ROUEN

WHICH DEMONSTRATES THE WISDOM OF THAT ANCIENT WRIT WHICH DECLARES THAT, "HE THAT IS SLOW TO ANGER IS BETTER THAN THE MIGHTY, AND HE THAT RULETH HIS SPIRIT THAN HE THAT TAKETH A CITY"

After supper at the Saracen's Head that evening Guilbert de Rouen walked briskly toward the Manor House. Crossing the drawbridge at the Manor House, he spoke a cheery, "Good even," to Jack Shepherd at the winch in the tower, and that worthy returned the compliment with an interest that betokened mutual good understanding.

The courtyard was alive with men-at-arms drilling, and with servitors in the happy abandon of outdoor games. From the paddock floated the strains of a viol, and about the player stalwart men and buxom women romped the figures of an English dance, till the air rang with merriment. With a friendly nod here and there, and with a hearty personal greeting for Martin Reeve, Guilbert crossed the open yard to the porch, where Lady Wellham received him with the heartiness reserved for personal or family friends.

"Welcome, Guilbert de Rouen," she exclaimed. "We bargain for the entire evening. Shortly

Heloise will be here, and you must tell us how you met Geoffrey Chaucer at Court. No running off tonight, remember!"

Guilbert laughed his appreciation of the greeting. As he ascended the steps to the porch the Dwarf whispered Heloise's message into his ear, whereupon Lady Wellham smiled, rightly guessing that his company that evening would not be for her. Guilbert took the seat she proffered, but the Dwarf's message was in his ear and the Chaucer story refused to come. Moreover, all other topics of conversation limped, or failed to come at all. Guilbert fidgeted ten minutes, his eyes playing truant toward the garden. At length he arose, begging to be excused.

"Chaucer another time!" he exclaimed gaily, kissing his hand to Lady Wellham as he descended. He crossed to the courtyard, and passed on through the wicket into the garden. Beyond the gate, the shimmer of silk caught his eye and quickened his step. Down the path, beyond the fountain, he came upon Heloise, now busy among her flowers.

During the year love had been a sealed book between Guilbert and Heloise. Guilbert had kept his double pledge. He had loved, and he had loved secretly and in silence. His footing at the Manor House had seemed precisely what it had been before his rejection. He and Heloise had been so much together that their friends had misjudged them to be lovers, anticipating wedding bells. Happily, the foul gossip about the Abbot and

Heloise was largely confined within the walls of the Abbey. To the outside world the Abbot's tutorship sufficiently explained all that was public of his relations with Heloise; and the public mind awarded to Guilbert the prize which he had really lost.

Guilbert's busy life, together with his robust constitution, had kept him in a healthy frame of mind. He had not lost courage. He held to the Abbot's integrity and set himself resolutely to disbelieve the Abbey gossip, staking his faith on the high honor of Heloise. This was sometimes hard to do, but, appearances notwithstanding, through evil and through good report, Guilbert counted the Abbot good, and Heloise pure. Sometimes an extra warmth in Heloise's voice and manner, in the garden or in the house, revived hope in him. But his love was timid enough, and wise enough, not to venture upon what might merely be its own partial interpretation of common and insignificant actions. His love was of the sort that runs deep, waits well, and strengthens itself in silence. Thus time was his best friend and he waited. Guilbert's siege of Heloise's heart was so unostentatious that Heloise sometimes fancied, not without a little involuntary sigh, that he had given up his quest.

"Are flowers your slaves, or are you your flowers' slave, Mistress Heloise!" queried Guilbert, laughing and extending his hand.

"A most original conundrum, and quite unanswerable!" said Heloise, picking half a dozen bachelor's buttons, and giving them to Guilbert.

"I concur with your judgment! Greatly do I need them!" said Guilbert, and his teasing laugh flushed Heloise's cheek. He added, casually: "Ah! You grow heartsease? 'Tis a pretty flower. An it fulfilled its name it would be worth a thousand times its weight in gold. Pray pluck me a bloom!"

"Like you my sweet-williams?" she asked, perhaps to turn the banter on to less dangerous ground.

"Aye!" said he, "and the fragrance of your briars guided me into your presence just now."

Heloise plucked a bouquet, and Guilbert carried it as they walked together to the fountain. They seated themselves on the bench. Heloise fell into a pensive mood, and the trouble Guilbert vaguely felt made him grave. Had she not sent for him to come into the garden? What could be on her mind?

Feeling his way toward what he imagined might be a cause of trouble, Guilbert asked: "Have you no news yet of the stolen will?"

Heloise shook her head, wearily. "The Dwarf avers that it is in the Abbey," she said, dissent and incredulity in her tones.

"So he tells me," answered Guilbert. " 'Tis passing strange. If the Dean has that arrow, 'tis a wonder he does not shoot it. I doubt that he has it in his quiver!"

Silence fell again. At length Heloise spoke. "Green Devil's theft troubles me but little now.

Or, that trouble is smothered by a bigger. These days I'm worried about Abbot Thomas. What has become of the Abbot, Guilbert? I fear matters are awry within the Abbey. You are well acquainted among the monks. Where suppose you Abbot Thomas has gone?"

"I know not," answered Guilbert, and there fell an awkward silence between them. Her warm, open interest in the Abbot chilled Guilbert. Some curious psychological influence at work in Heloise fixed a temporary gulf between her and the man whose aid she sought. Guilbert recovered himself first, and continued:

"The Brotherhood thinks the Abbot has deserted to Wyclif's camp. I happen to know that he leaned that way, and it may well be that he has joined Wyclif in London town."

"But, Guilbert, I cannot tell why, but I find myself mistrusting the canons. The Abbot is my tutor, as you know. We have browsed together the field of books, and discussed all sorts of schemes for helping England's poor. Well do I know his leaning towards Wyclif—I lean far that way myself, and long to help. Also do I know that the monks fear and hate Wyclif. It comes to me that they would do aught in their power to prevent so powerful an ally from reaching Wyclif's camp. And, Guilbert, I must say that my suspicion rests full upon Dean Fletcher. He comes in on the tide that sweeps Abbot Thomas out. 'Tis not for naught that he licks his chops like a wolf. I fear

he has trained foul play upon Abbot Thomas, in order that he may inherit his place and power."

"Well! well! I had not thought of that. Upon what rests your suspicion, and what do you suspect?" asked Guilbert, his interest now thoroughly aroused.

"Nay, that is clear beyond me. I do not know," answered Heloise. "All I know is, that I fear foul play upon the Abbot, and appeal to you for what help you may be able to give."

Perhaps it was the open pleasure which mantled Guilbert's face, and revealed to Heloise a possible and a misleading interpretation of her appeal to him. She added, hastily, "Father is in London with the King, so I made bold to come to you for the help he would have rendered, had he been at home."

Her tardy qualification did not hurt Guilbert much. He had seen her trust in his strength before she had drawn over it the thin veil, and his enjoyment of it touched the magic spring of hope. Under the spell of Heloise's presence and appeal he forgot that the Abbot was his rival, and his sympathy went out to the man of misfortune whom Heloise would help.

"I know not how I may be able to help, or that I can bring you any help at all. But what I can do, that I will. I will question the monks, and even Dean Fletcher himself. Disturbance is pending. Perhaps our local troubles may give us a glimpse of the vanished Abbot's trail. I'll keep an open eye."

At Guilbert's mention of impending trouble

Heloise's countenance fell. A few moments of reflection, and she laid her hand gently on Guilbert's arm, saying, "Disturbance? Troubles pending? Tell me then, Guilbert, are we to have a rising here?"

It was Guilbert's turn to be surprised. To the query in his startled eyes Heloise answered, "O, I know somewhat! Dispatches came to the Manor House this morning from Kent. The villeins there are rising. Blood will surely be shed. The King's men are out, summoning the knights to join the king at London. Yesterday Sir William left for London, and the dispatches missed him. But, will the rising spread here, think you, Guilbert? Will it?"

"I fear it will," answered Guilbert, very quietly.

"Is the Manor House in danger?"

"No,—you need have no fear. Thanks to the kindliness and the justice of your house, you are safe. The villeins hereabouts would fight for you rather than against you. But they are greatly incensed against the Abbey. Only a miracle can prevent the mob from attacking Dean Fletcher's newly feathered nest. They think treasure is hoarded there, and they need it for their campaign."

What Heloise had seen in the magic mirror at the house of the witch, surged back into her mind,—monks feathering arrows, attack and counter attack, the gathering of ravens about carcasses in the enclosure of a religious house, and the awful clangor of war. With a feeling of awe, she felt herself in

the grip of invisible, imponderable forces which swept her outward, onward, beyond herself; but whither, or how far, she neither knew nor could guess. Greatly moved, she turned to Guilbert, and said,

"Rising or no rising, Abbey attacked or let alone, Abbot Thomas has mysteriously disappeared. I suspect Dean Fletcher is at the bottom of the mystery. Father will investigate when he returns. In the meanwhile, you will help, Guilbert?"

"Most certainly I will. I see the Dean every day, and I will question him."

Then they spoke of the People's Cause, of the bleeding heart of the common folk, of the uprising that was already stirring in Kent, and of its threat of conflagration for all the land, of the hope for better things in England, of the time when the young King should be redeemed from evil factions and from the fripperies of a dissolute court, and should henceforth give his time and heart undividedly to his people's welfare. When they separated Guilbert knew that the heart of Heloise was with the People's Cause, and her profound respect for him was heightened by the well-founded feeling that he was connected in some influential way with the rising that was about to redeem the land.

As the fates would have it, on his way to the Saracen's Head Guilbert met Dean Fletcher. The two men passed the time of day, and fell into conversation, wandering together down a bridle trail into the woods. Dean Fletcher was in fine humor.

The two sat upon a fallen tree while the Dean told an amusing story. At the first opening Guilbert turned the conversation toward what was in his mind.

"By the by, Dean Fletcher," said Guilbert, "what has really become of Abbot Thomas?"

Surprise, astonishment, alarm, followed each other over the Dean's face in quick succession. It was only for a moment, however, but in Guilbert's mind it put the Dean in the wrong, and confirmed for him Heloise's suspicion. Then the masterly mask dropped automatically into place, and a bland smile played over the Dean's face as he answered: "Well, Guilbert mine, I regret to say that the Abbot left us, minus proper ceremony, as we all do think. And from wherever he may now be he has condescended to send us not a word as yet,"—and the Dean's tongue shot out to moisten his lips, which then closed tightly, as though nothing more was to be said upon the subject.

"But, Dean Fletcher,"—and Guilbert was very much in earnest,—"you know the Abbot will have to be found. So prominent a man cannot drop out of sight without search being instituted. The authorities will make due inquisition into the matter. Tell me, Dean Fletcher, what you know about the matter, that I may help the Abbot's friends to discover his whereabouts."

"What I know, Guilbert de Rouen, you would not care to hear, as by experience I can well testify," answered the Dean, sneering in spite of him-

self. Then he had the blazing indiscretion to add, slapping his hand upon his knee by way of emphasis: "By sonties, Guilbert de Rouen, I cannot understand you! You of all men! You are blind as a bat, and deaf as an adder! Of all the men in the world you should be the most glad to have the Abbot drop out of sight! The course is now clear for you not only to love the maid, but also to wed her! The Abbot, I tell you, man, was your successful rival at the Manor House! He and she were too much together!"

How it happened Guilbert never knew, and ever after he regretted that it happened at all, but the foolish and wicked words were hardly spoken before Dean Fletcher was spinning somersaults backward in the brush. When he halted in his ludicrous retreat, the Dean sat holding his jaw, swaying back and forth in rage and in pain; and, with his fists clenched, Guilbert was standing over him.

"Mention her name again in connection with your damnable gossip," Guilbert cried, "and I'll have you hanged higher than Haman, and drawn and quartered to boot, to teach snivelling monks decency of tongue. You spiteful, crafty, contemptible, devilish, human snake!"

The sight of a stain of his own blood on his hand, not the sting of Guilbert's hot words, nor his heavy blow, stirred Dean Fletcher beyond control. He picked himself up, and, his face purple with rage, he leaped towards Guilbert, hiss-

ing, "Mark my words, Guilbert de Rouen, my fine fellow, you'll live to repent this cowardly attack on a defenseless monk."

Then he gathered control of himself, and, with a fine scornful air, turned to go.

Guilbert called out after him, "Dean Fletcher, it were better you should tell what you know of the whereabouts of Abbot Thomas. The law is bigger than a monk, and, by sonties, I'll have it at you. We'll win your secret, if we tear it out of your dead brain!"

The taunt stung the Dean. Quick as a flash his hand flew to the spot on his thigh where, had he been a soldier, his poniard would have hung. The hasty action threw his habit out of shape, so that Guilbert clearly saw the outline of a poniard under the gown,—though why a monk should secretly carry a poniard was by no means clear.

However, the Dean did not draw. He turned about, and, flaming with rage, hurled back a parting shot: "When the stone walls of Thornton shout their secrets in the public ear, then will my lips tell you, Guilbert de Rouen, what more I know of the paramours of Abbot Thomas and the woman Heloise! Till then, I warn you, keep watch, for I'll get you, sure as death and hell. And, after I have done with you, the Devil shall have you forever!"

The irate monk vanished through the thicket in a monumental rage, brushing off his habit with his hands, and muttering sundry imprecations as he

went. Guilbert de Rouen returned to the Inn, greatly scoring himself because his loss of temper had cost him a victory it was necessary for him to have won.

CHAPTER XVI. THE HOLY PALMER

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THE HOLY PALMER

IN WHICH IT WOULD APPEAR THAT MEN, LIKE THINGS, SOMETIMES ARE NOT WHAT THEY SEEM, AND THAT A HOLY MAN MAY LEAD A DOUBLE LIFE AND NOT BE DAMNED FOR IT

On a somnolent afternoon, a week later, when the land was bathed in summer sunshine, Guilbert de Rouen lounged on the porch at the Saracen's Head. A soporific spell lay upon the scene, as though it were a land of poppies in a far-off world of dreams. The monotone of a distant voice droned in his ear. Guilbert was dimly conscious of the voice some little time before he heeded the fact or set his thought to determine what the voice might mean. By the witchery that inheres in natural harmony, the distant voice hid itself by commingling with the drowsy sounds of the summer afternoon—the drone of bees, the twitter of birds, the snoring of a bull pup under the bench, the sharps and flats of pots and pans in the kitchen, all mingled with the murmur of grooms' voices gossiping by the stable door. At length the grooms crossed the courtyard into the street, on investigation bent. Their action brought the voice fully into Guilbert's consciousness, and the monotone leaped to life and sense in his ear.

"—Across the seas you come to strange lands and queer people. There be mighty rivers, and great cities with ivory bridges that span rivers of silver. The hills are vine-clad, and the vinters tie their vines with links of sausages. You can buy a goose there for a penny, and have the gosling into the bargain. I saw a mountain made of cheese, mitey as any German could wish, and good withal, both to smell and to eat. They cut the cheese with pick and axe, exactly as they mine copper in Cornwall, and serve it in the dining-hall on ivory wheelbarrows. Rivers flow bank-full with Malmsey wine; an you will, you can be drunk all week over Sunday. By and by, you come to the great mountains, if the robbers don't snap you up the while, and, if you win, past haunted woods and castles, and by ghosts that walk both day and night. The mountains be so high and steep that the only way to climb them is to plant a Jack's bean, and hold fast to the stalk the while it grows. When you are above the clouds, you gently swing the stalk, my men, farther and farther each time, till you reach a ledge of rock with your feet—hanging on like a leech lest the swinging throw you off. Then do you let go the stalk! And, behold, you straddle the ridge pole of the world! Then you slide down the other side—ugh!—through frost and snow, plump into sunny Italy. Before you know it you are in Rome, among flocks of scarlet cardinals, and priests robed in purple and gold, and other folk of the big glittering world."



THE PALMER.

Guilbert laughed softly at this cornucopian stream of racy exaggeration. He put on his Flanders hat, and moved out to see who might be the affable fellow whose speech was so veracious, so stimulating and so entertaining!

By the gateway of the parish church a Holy Palmer held a growing crowd of country yokels by the ears, entertaining them with this highly colored story of his pilgrimage. Guilbert joined the listeners gathered about the stranger.

"Strange cities there be in foreign lands," the Palmer continued quaintly. What think you of a city wedded to the sea every year! Think of a bride and groom like that, my merry men! Such a procession of magnificoes in be-lanterned boats, formed the bridal party—all decked in gold, and flashing precious stones—that you fancied that the New Jerusalem was come down to earth again, and the sea of glass was turned to gold. At Siena they race horses in the market place once a year, and, believe me, my merry men, the riders whip each other instead of their lagging steeds, while the people about the course wager their last stiver on the foregone conclusion of the race! O, a pilgrim sees strange sights, and danger travels cheek by jowl with him all the way. But he journeys on, by land and sea, through weary days and nights, till he climbs the last hill, and there, there at last, before his joyful eyes, lies the Holy City—the City of the True Cross and of the Holy Sepulchre, begirt with hills, beautiful to look upon,

the shining guerdon of the pilgrim's toil and devotion!"

Enthusiasm lighted the man's weather-beaten face, and tears were in his eyes, while his auditors stood about him open-mouthed and spellbound. The man was robust, his frame well knit together, and he looked the part he spoke. His bushy beard and long hair were crowned picturesquely with a broad black hat, the band of which was ornamented with scallop shells—the tell-tale records of a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James of Compostella. A long grey cloak covered his figure, and was girded at the waist with a black belt. The miniature bottle-and-bell depending from his belt, proclaimed to all the world the fact that the good man had burnt candles at the tomb of St. Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. Palm leaves embroidered down the front of his cloak, and stuck jauntily among the shells on his hat, gave to the man the proud distinction of having fought and begged through to the Holy Sepulchre itself.

While he spoke, villeins coming in from the field augmented the Palmer's auditors. To meet the new interest he lifted a peddler's pack on to the retaining wall of the churchyard, and with many a jocular word and mysterious sign, he laid the contents of the pack about him on the wall, his auditors edging in closer the while, in order that they might the better see.

"Here is fine cutlery from Sheffield," cried the Palmer, exhibiting each article as he spoke, "knives

sharp enough for Saladin's clever headsman, and bargains cheap enough for cot-wife, housewife, or castle-wife, and good enough for princess or queen. Would you have broaches from Milan, jewel-set as you see? Leave off, fair ladies, your old wooden skewers. Here are fine new-fangled pins, bright and sharp, made to fasten your skirt or wimple. I sold a package each to all the fine ladies of the Court as I came through London town, and very pleased were they to get the new conveniences. They are expensive ware, but I will sell them cheap.

"I have beaver hats from Flanders for the men, an they will, and silk darnick for women's fine kirtles. Is it wimples you would have? Here they are white and soft, fine wool, or of rich silk if you wish, soft and good enough for Christ's own mother —and you may have them as cheap as you will. This Flemish weave from Manchester,—note it well." His voice grew confidential, behind the back of his hand, but was still loud enough so that all could hear. "Here is an extra fine woolen pattern, an ell wide and more, of fine Spanish mixture, that hath paid no duty to the king (and never will), and so is a very special value. The like of it you can buy nowhere else in the land."

Awhile the Palmer drove a thrifty trade, and the Thornton dames gloated over sundry rare bargains. Then Guilbert noted that a new spirit came upon the Palmer. The man opened a small compartment in his pack, and took therefrom various

smaller and evidently more precious ware, setting them by themselves on the wall. The people craned to see what the packages might contain. Guilbert smiled, knowing by experience what was to come.

"I have relics here, good friends," he began, crossing himself and handling his treasures reverently. "They are of enormous value, but I shall sell them cheap today, that one and all, rich and poor alike, may be able to buy their most rare virtue." He held the relics to view one by one, and his ready wit drew Guilbert into the crowd, highly amused and entertained.

"My good men, all," he continued earnestly, "a piece of wood from Noah's ark, brought by a friend of mine from the far-off land of Armenia. A fragment of this will fend the plague from palace or cot. In this phial, my friends, is holy soot, gathered from the furnace in which the three Holy Children were so fiercely tried, as holy writ would tell you, an you could read. Added to apothecary's lotion 'tis good for gout, rheumatism, toothache or bunions."

"This oak wood was taken by a pilgrim from the manger at Bethlehem in which Mary's child was cradled, as the Christmas shows do tell. I sold a fragment to a villein on the Rhine ten years agone. He had no thatch to his cot, and his purse was empty after paying for the relic. Today he is a rich merchant, trading far a-field, with much good money to his credit in the banks. 'Tis a

lucky wood, and I would that you all were growing richer by its power."

"Now look you here! 'Tis a bunch of thorns from the crown the Savior wore the First Good Friday. I sell them one by one, and they have marvelous virtue, as hundreds have experienced. The Bishop of Compostella blessed them for me six years agone, and they are good for miracles of healing yet. Behold, here! Greatest and rarest relic of them all is this feather from the archangel Gabriel's wing. Step up! Step up, men and women. Be not afraid! View my wares, and buy yourselves rich."

Perhaps money was scarce, or a close look at the sacred objects may not have inspired confidence, or other and quite different influences may have been at work. At any rate the market was dull, and the Palmer added little to his wealth even by selling relics. However, the man was by no means discouraged, and his antics kept the crowd in fine humor.

Suddenly the Palmer changed his tactics. In a spirit that mingled banter and insinuation in equal parts, he broke out in an entirely new vein. "Well, my Masters, it seems that I cannot sell you goods today. But, by sonties, I will tomorrow! By all the holy saints, tomorrow will I empty my pack of every blessed thing! In the meanwhile, to advertise my bargains, and to surely bring you back tomorrow, I will give away a fortune of goods today. Do you, the lucky ones, to whom I make

these gifts, advertise to your neighbors that never before was such a Palmer in Thornton village. King Richard's land has never seen such bargains as I will show. Here my man, do you help me with this present matter in hand. Nay, come along; be not afraid. I'll neither turn you into a mouse, nor steal your wife! Moreover, you shall have ample reward."

The Palmer spoke to honest Martin Reeve, and that worthy pushed his way among his neighbors, who tossed rough humor at him as he elbowed through. Old Martin's face was wreathed in smiles, and he did not fail to return his neighbors' banter in kind, with something quaintly added by way of interest. When Martin reached the Palmer, the holy man whispered something into his ear, which Guilbert could but notice had the effect of winning Martin most heartily into his new service. From a compartment of his pack hitherto untouched the Palmer drew certain trinkets and small ware. Martin clambered to the top of the wall and stood beside the pack, scrutinizing the faces of the crowd.

The Palmer handed his new assistant a package, and Martin lost no time in crying, "Ralph Shepherd, here's a woolen sample for the wife and bairns. Hello! Danby of the Inn! The Palmer says this muffler is for you to use instead of ale, and is to keep you warm when the nights are cold!—"

"Nay! No handing!" broke in the Palmer. "Come, and get the goods yourselves. What's worth having's worth fetching! Make nobody

your pack mule! Let the men answer, not the women."

Martin called the names of more than a score, and handed to each man a package, selected by the thrifty Palmer with some show of care. Guilbert noted that the gifts caused remarkable hilarity among the villagers. Men went about slapping each other on the back and shaking hands, as though it were a feast day, or as though the Palmer had brought about the consummation of some long-looked-for and wide-reaching event.

At length the Palmer's eye rested on Guilbert de Rouen, who was standing with mine host and Betty Danby on the outskirt of the crowd. "I must not forget the fine gentleman!" he exclaimed, and he turned to search his pack for something suitable to Guilbert's evident rank. "Take this to the fine gentleman, and tell him he may examine my pack at leisure at the Inn, if he will."

He put a silver tinder box into Martin's hands. It was a dainty as well as a useful article, and one of considerable value, and Martin eyed it with evident interest as he bore it to its destination.

"I hope to enjoy your company at the Inn," the Palmer shouted across the crowd to Guilbert. "And may you never find the tinder wet when you want a fire."

Then the jolly man flung a handful of confections among the crowd, and while everybody was

scrambling for the sweets he closed his pack and disappeared.

Guilbert placed the tinder box in his pocket, remarking, with a good-humored laugh, that the Palmer would doubtless exact double pay on the morrow.

After supper Guilbert sat in front of the Saracen's Head a little apart from other loungers, watching lads pitch quoits. Unconsciously he fell to toying with his new tinder box. The lid was open, but Guilbert's thoughts were busy with the Palmer, with foreign travel, and with the European cities whose life he knew so well. His long list of continental acquaintances crowded into his memory most pleasantly. He wondered what parts the Palmer had traveled, whether he had met any of his personal friends, and whether it might not be possible that the Palmer had messages for him. He was meditating dreamily, enjoying the prospect of the approaching visit with a traveled man, when his eye fell upon a little wad of parchment thrust into the bottom of the compartment intended to hold the tinder. Hastily unrolling the parchment, he was greatly surprised to see his own name written thereon.

Guilbert was now wide awake! He closed the lid, thrust the box into his pocket, and hastened into the privacy of his own room. When he had shut the door, he unfolded the parchment, and, greatly astonished, he read:

"Lovers of the People's Cause will meet tonight in the stables of the Inn. Come."

The note cast Guilbert de Rouen into the valley of decision. In company with all England he knew revolution was in the air. Discontent had everywhere turned into arch conspiracy. News from Kent and Essex was of the blackest, and daily grew worse. The poor were breaking into open revolt. Love of justice had thrust many who were rich into the swelling ranks of discontent. Guilbert's sympathies were naturally with the under dog. But the consequences of revolution were most serious, especially if the revolution failed. In that event Guilbert could not blind himself to the fact that revolt meant the pains of death, or, at best, an escape from the country that would mean banishment therefrom for life.

His suit at the Manor House showed little prospect of success, but with Guilbert hope was faith, and he was loth to be obliged to put the sea for a moat between him and the castle he fain would win. Still the People's Cause sadly needed leaders. Ignorance and incompetence were likely to lead it into many a foul ditch. Guilbert spent an hour or two in deep study of the local situation, and of his own relationship to it, till the midnight hour rang from the distant Abbey tower, and both the Inn and the village seemed to be sound asleep.

Then there came a signal at the closed doors of the courtyard. A groom answered with a lantern, briskly but very quietly. After brief and low parley, the groom let somebody in. For an hour or more stealthy footsteps, singly and in twos and

threes, crossed the yard, and the stable door opened and shut upon all who came. At length Guilbert arose, his decision made, and the door closed upon him also.

CHAPTER XVII. CONSPIRACY

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CONSPIRACY

WHICH DULY CHRONICLES THE STRANGE DOINGS OF A MIDNIGHT CONSPIRACY, AND SETS FORTH THE SEVERAL PARTS TAKEN THEREIN BY SUNDRY FOLK WHO MAINTAIN PROMINENT ROLES IN THE CAST OF THE STORY

Among the Rembrant shadows of the stable the Holy Palmer met Guilbert with outstretched hand. "Welcome, Guilbert de Rouen," he said, "I thought you were never coming."

"Brother Barr!" exclaimed Guilbert. "I knew not that you were here."

"Here, and at your service!" answered the genial man, with a ceremonious bow. "I wager my bottle and bell that you did not penetrate my disguise! The gewgaws are all gone, you see. Compostella trinkets and holy relics! Bottle and bell, palm and shell!"

The man laughed softly, in good humor with himself. Then he sobered, looking about upon the men as they talked in groups in the stable. "I was forced to these frippery chapman wares," he continued. "At Lincoln the Sheriff's men had news of me on the road, and planned to bag game! Overnight the Brotherhood turned me into a Palmer. In the morning I sold a holy relic to the

Sheriff's wife in her parlor. I yarned with the guard at the Roman gate, and came on my way in open daylight. So, you did not know me! Neither did old Martin!" he concluded, as he chuckled in high glee at the happy outcome of his adventure.

"How do matters stand? What's the latest news?" asked Guilbert.

"News enough, and good enough!" exclaimed Brother Barr, rubbing his hands with enthusiasm. "Kent has risen. Essex is neck and neck with Kent, straining toward London. The advance on London may begin any day. Indeed, I have reason to believe that the first blow has already been struck. Moreover, thank God, John Ball is out of prison. There's a man for you! O, a new day dawns, and my blood tingles to see its sun rise. I can hear the tramp of russet!"

"But, did Mars ever usher in a good day?" interrupted Guilbert. "I like not to see the sword unsheathed."

The agitator answered instantly, and with warmth: "Only the sword can right our wrongs. You who were born out of the land, view the land's woes too much at arm's length. Our troubles lie close underneath our hearts. 'Tis time the people had a chance. Heard you ever Islip's letter to the old king? No? Not often does a priest ring true to the People's Cause. I suppose, however, that Islip is more concerned with the woes of manor houses than with those of villeins."

Brother Barr searched his wallet. When he found the parchment, he held it to the lantern that hung from a rafter. The dim light gleamed on the black page, and on the strong lines of the man's face—a face graven with the tragedy of the slow up-winding ways of man. He read to Guilbert Archbishop Islip's famous letter to King Edward:

"'When men hear of your coming, everybody at once, for sheer fear, sets about hiding, or eating, or getting rid of their geese and chickens or other possessions, that they may not utterly lose them through your arrival. The purveyors and servers of your court seize on men and horses in the midst of their field work. They seize on the very bullocks that are at plow or at sowing, and force them to work for two or three days at a time without a penny of payment. It is no wonder that men make dole and murmur at your approach, for, as the truth is in God, I myself, whenever I hear a rumor of it, be I at home, or in Chapter, or in Church, or at study, nay if I am saying mass, even I, in my own person, tremble in every limb.'"

"What think you of that?" queried Brother Barr, replacing the parchment in his pouch. "It does not tell half. True, young Richard is not as bad as old Edward, but he will be when he is as well used to the saddle. They all grow callous with rule. The people need bread. They earn more than penny ale and rye. Cot as well as palace should have meat and fish, to make bone and sinew."

There was silence in the stall awhile, and Guilbert meditated. The low drone of whispered conversation among the stalls in other parts of the stable was all that indicated the presence of the other conspirators, so quiet was it. A man opened a lantern to snuff the candle therein, and stamped the evil-smelling wick into the clay of the floor. Somewhere a sow snored and her litter squealed protest against this midnight intrusion. Out doors a cock hailed the coming dawn.

"Do you attack the Manor House?" asked Guilbert, a note of apprehension in his voice.

Brother Barr smiled, and answered, "No! Sir William is too much one of us. At heart he is with us. He has taken his men-at-arms to London to serve the King, and Martin Reeve and Ralph Shepherd, whom he leaves in charge here, will play into our hands. Mars will not disturb your bird at the Manor House!"

"'Tis well," answered Guilbert. "I thank you—"

Suddenly, and as silently as though he had been but a bundle of feathers, Dwarf Henry dropped into the stall from the hay loft, and stood looking stolidly into the faces of the two men.

"My conscience!" exclaimed Brother Barr, under his breath. "'Tis well you are a friend. A foe as stealthy would turn steel between our ribs before we could half wink an eye! What news, now?"

The Dwarf grinned his appreciation of the compliment. Then he answered drolly, the while his twinkling eyes belied his solemn face, "There'll be

five hundred men in Thornton woods two nights from now. They will come self-armed, because there is nobody to arm them. Not a pitchfork, scythe, or sickle will be left where they come from! Such harvesters! They'll fill their own wallets, or go hungry! But hungry men fight longest and best! La Rue bade me give you this, and warn you to be ready; Guilbert de Rouen, you, and all."

The Dwarf handed Brother Barr a sealed package, and while the russet priest read the missive, he continued, under his breath, and greatly excited, "Dean Fletcher certainly has the stolen deed to the Manor lands. Yesterday I saw it again. All other parchments are in the muniment room, but the Dean keeps the Manor deed in the chest by his bed. He dotes on that parchment! O, but I tell you, he is clever! He screws his eyes into me! He will not have me in his precious house any more! Now, also, behold, he forbids me the Abbey! What has Dwarfy done? I'll go in with the villeins, over the walls! Let me at the Dean! Saint Satan! I'll crush his ribs, and break his shaven pate!"

"Well, we'll give you a chance, day after tomorrow," said Brother Barr. "Meanwhile, you may go. Keep watch. Report aught stirring." The two men smiled, and the Dwarf ambled out of the stall to a hearty welcome among the conspirators.

"We must have the Abbey," continued Brother Barr, when the Dwarf had gone. "Had Thomas de Gretham remained Abbot, no harm would have been aimed at him, or at his house. But this

Abbot-elect is a different kind of man. He seems to be a bad man. He sides against the common folk. Moreover, the parchment records of the whole country-side are stored in the muniment room for safe keeping. We must destroy these records, for they are the legal instruments of the people's serfdom. By the way, Guilbert, where can Abbot Thomas be? I vow, there seems to be a mystery about his going out, and about Fletcher's coming in. Richard's is a crafty pate! The Dwarf's no fool; he hits him off! It is very strange that a man should entirely disappear so suddenly."

Guilbert shook his head, as though the mystery were too deep for him. He mused awhile, and Brother Barr watched him earnestly. Then Guilbert said, firmly, almost vehemently, putting the conviction of his soul into the words, "Yes, we will attack the Abbey! I'm with you, sword and all. Once inside, we'll singe the Dean and serve the Manor House by burning the stolen will! 'Twill be a fine special Providence! Here is my hand on it and may we all win clear of the gallows!"

While the two men stood tense with solemn feeling, their hands clasped in token of the compact which easily might lead both to the gibbet, a man in russet stepped noiselessly out of the shadow of a pile of hay. He, too, wore the garb of Wyclif's Poor Priests.

"Your pardon comrades," said he, with easy voice and pleasant address. "Accident made me eavesdropper. Unless my ears deceived me, you

were speaking of Kent and Essex. I am just from those parts, and can give you the latest news—"

"But, in the name of heaven, who are you, and how came you here?" interrupted Brother Barr, sharply.

"I am a clerk of Oxenford, Thirwood by name. Of Wyclif's Poor Priests, and of the Brotherhood am I, as you well can see. At the door I gave the sign, even as the rest. I am one with you in the Cause."

Brother Barr's suspicion was not allayed. "And, pray, what is the sign and countersign tonight?" he demanded, sharply.

"The sign is 'Saul'; the countersign, 'David and Jonathan,'" promptly answered the clerk. He took from the bosom of his habit a missive, and gave it to Brother Barr, who promptly broke the seal and read the parchment.

Turning sharply to the russet clerk, Brother Barr said, "You may retire. It were better for you to retire quickly, and to the Inn. Should I need you further, I will send for you. Dwarf Henry," —and at the sound of his name, that worthy immediately appeared—"convey this priest to the Inn. Entertain him in the kitchen."

When the Dwarf and the clerk had disappeared, Brother Barr turned toward Guilbert nervously. "I like not the looks of the fellow," he said. "Perhaps, however, I am prejudiced, because he surprised us! One hates to be surprised in the midst of conspiracy! But he is so smooth! He turns

corners too easily! Were he in Hades, he'd oil his way out! We must have an eye on him, or mischief may follow. The Dwarf will watch him, I doubt not! However, be he honest man or knave, he certainly brings authentic news. Here's John Ball's own writing and signature. The people are astir. Canterbury is in our hands. Our fellows have sacked the Archbishop's palace. Directed by triumphant Russet, the snivelling monks have elected a new Archbishop in place of old Simon Sudbury! I wonder how his grace will like that turn in the wheel of fortune. If Russet gets hold of Simon's person, they'll swing the old fellow sky high! In good John Ball the Cause now has a head. Now will there be fire as well as wisdom in our councils! The cry is, 'On to London.' I can hear their tramp, tramp, even now. We need to busy ourselves getting the revolt started here."

Guilbert and Brother Barr started on a tour of the stable. In a cart shed at the rear, they came upon an excited group. The villeins were gathered about a man seated upon an up-turned plow. As were all the rest, the man was clad in homespun. To all appearances he might have been a villein, though it was his vehement protest against that estate that first attracted Guilbert's attention to him. Guilbert noted with horror a fiery purple scar in the center of the man's forehead, where, evidently, the letter "V" had recently been branded with hot iron.

"Neither I nor mine, had ever been villeins,"

the man was protesting, when Guilbert and Brother Barr came upon the group. "We have always lived free in Barton, and I know not that any of our folk were ever villeins. But I went to Barrowe a week ago to see my cousin wed, and on the street a damned man-of-law set the reeve upon me. Fight as I would, they overpowered me, and branded me a villein. And now I bear the scar for life."

The shamed man buried his face in his hands, and he sobbed like a hurt child. He rose, clinched his hands in fierce, bitter passion, and, with eyes that saw through to the sky, lifted his face towards the thatch. Then in the spirit of a hot curse he hissed between his teeth, "When the rising comes, if that damned man-of-law or reeve escape me, then, O Holy Mother, I'm not branded!"

The man sat down again on the plow, and turned his face from the lantern, that shadow might hide the hateful scar, and that he might not feel the eyes of his fellows riveted upon his sign of shame. The men about him sobbed their sympathy, and breathed instant revenge. His comrades knew that multiplied hundreds of such unlawful, unrighteous, inhuman brandings lay at the bottom of the impending revolt. They clinched their fists, feeling themselves to be the agents of divine retribution. The day of reckoning would be the day after tomorrow. Let the People's oppressors beware! By sonties, let them beware!

The men pressed about Brother Barr. Very adroitly the agitator spoke to them, warping his

facts so as to fire the peasant heart. The revolt had actually begun. Kent was in arms. Essex held the north bank of the Thames in the march on London. King and government would soon be in the people's hands, when they would right the piled up wrongs of ages, and bring in the reign of a thousand happy years. Every man must do his part, and act with vigor and promptness, and also be obedient to those in command. Let the men gather at Thornton at the appointed hour. From there they would join other companies in the march on Lincoln. In Lincoln they had many friends, and the gates would be open. Then would the rule of kings and nobles be ended, and Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity hold sway over all the land.

The conference fell to planning the local revolt. There was unanimity against disturbing the Manor House. But the Abbey was foreordained to destruction. A babel of voices foreordained its doom.

The men's ready credulity pained Guilbert.

"The lazy monks are rich—rich as Jews, and we need both treasure and money for ourselves, and for the Cause."

"I mind me when the French galleon stranded on the Humber. Our Thornton monks hauled cartload after cartload of treasure, and stowed the plunder in the vaults. Their vaults be bulging full; a sight to see!"

"Once a lay brother took me into the treasury, and I saw stacks of gold and silver, tons of costly things stowed away in strong boxes!"

"There's more to tell! The Keelby witch told Rob Swain that there is a treasure cave in the Abbey. Even the monks know nothing about it. You reach it by an underground passage from the south transept of the church. The witch said the cave is full of gold. We'll find that passage, and reap rich harvest!"

"I know all about the plate and treasure! When the monks had the big banquet, a year agone, when the religious popin-jays dedicated the new church, it was none other than I who helped set up the tables and make ready. I tell you the muniment room is bursting with plate and treasure, enough to make every poor villein rich as a lord. Never saw I such a sight as when the tables were spread. It looked like the streets of gold, the rivers of silver, and the acres of precious stones in Prester John's kingdom, that Brother Barr sometimes yarns about. It made my hands hungrier than my stomach, to see so much wealth lying idle. The lay brethren told me that they only use the plate once or twice in a lifetime. 'Tis a crying shame that so much wealth should be idle when the people starve."

"And we have only a pewter pot or two, and half a dozen earthenware crocks in our cots—bah! how came they to have so much and we so little."

"Let me tell you another thing, lads, far worse and yet far better than all. In the muniment room are stowed half the Manor Rolls, and deeds, and other law-scratchments of this part of the country —carried there for safe keep, my lads! Those be

our worst foes—lawyers and legal parchments. Being bunched together here under our noses, what's to prevent our burning them where they are? A rare bonfire, that!"

"Aye! Aye! We'll burn the rolls, and set our brothers free!"

A clatter of hoofs in the street suddenly ended the tirade against the monks. Boisterous shouts, the cracking of many whips, foul oaths and curses, accompanied by snatches of ribald song, invaded the stable. Instantly men blew out the candles in the lanters. A tense silence followed. Guilbert and Brother Barr stood quiet with the rest, waiting in suspense what might happen.

The door opened suddenly, and the Dwarf entered, greatly excited.

"'Tis Green Devil," he exclaimed. "'Tis the first sight of him I've had, and I want no other! He's no make-believe, I tell you, but the veritable fiend himself, albeit green instead of red. He rode a coal-black horse, and a dozen imps trailed behind him on either flank—two rows of flaming hell, I tell you! Their horses snorted fire at every leap! They had dogs, too,—bloodhounds, methought—very fierce, and strong of limb and fang. God help the poor this night, for they are beyond human help when Green Devil rides. The fiends sang 'Glasgerion' as they passed. Back to hell with the troop, I say, with their lewd singing, their stealing, their raping, and their killing."

A great awe had come over the men in the stable,

and it worked itself out into a strong purpose of revenge. Brother Barr spoke what the men dimly felt. "Fear not, Brothers," said he. "Green Devil's doom is sealed with the triumph of the People's Cause. Wrong-doing and anarchy will end when the people come to their own. Where both King and Sheriff have failed, we will surely lay the Green Devil. As the first signal of our triumph, Green Devil shall have a taut rope for his stock, and we'll rid the earth of his carrion."

When the first dim suggestion of morning twilight lay softly upon the land, the conspirators melted stealthily away, even as they had come. "The day after tomorrow, Brother, at midnight, secretly, and for victory," said Brother Barr solemnly to the men, as they passed out of the stable door.

Courtyard, stable, and inn, the church steeple, the village thatch, and the environing woods lay midway between dream and reality in the morning's dawn. There was light enough for the men to see in each others faces the grip of a grim purpose. They scattered silently, in the faith that victory was near.

After the men were gone, the lure of the summer dawn straightway led Guilbert toward the edge of the forest. He was elated, and strangely excited, thinking of the People's Cause, and wondering what coming events might bring forth. As he walked, he heard his name pronounced. Instantly he stood still, and looked around, expecting to see some friend. Nobody was in sight.

Thinking that imagination had played a trick with his ears, Guilbert walked on. A moment later the call came again, clear and distinct, and in a woman's voice. Again Guilbert stood still, looking around and listening intently, but he neither saw nor heard aught.

"'Tis a parrot from the Southlands," he laughed to himself, half amused, half vexed. "But who taught the mimic to pronounce my name!"

Again came the call: "Guilbert de Rouen! Guilbert de Rouen! You walk early this morning!"

A movement in a pine a few paces from the path attracted Guilbert's attention, and shortly he saw the Keelby witch descending from the tree to the ground.

"Called you me?" Guilbert asked, as the witch approached.

"Day after tomorrow, at midnight, secretly, and for victory," answered the witch, perfectly simulating Brother Barr's voice and manner.

Guilbert was astounded. Then, the secret was out! The witch stood in the path, her arms akimbo, her head cocked comically sideways, and her eye fixed on the top of a near-by pine. Guilbert's eye ranged the pine, but there was nothing to be seen.

"Called you me!" Guilbert asked again.

Without changing her position in the path, the witch cocked her head to the other side, and looked into the top of an oak, as she answered, "Attack the Abbey, burn the parchments every one, and set the Brothers free!"

"My conscience!" exclaimed Guilbert, under his breath. "'Tis uncanny. What, does she know everything?" Then aloud, and speaking directly to the witch he said, "I pray you, tell me, did you call my name? What may you want with me?"

In the path where she stood, the witch deliberately turned her back on Guilbert, and looked far down the way. Then, in a whimsical air, and waving her hand backward over her shoulder at Guilbert in a manner that almost made him laugh, in spite of the seriousness of the situation, she said: "Once inside the Abbey, Guilbert de Rouen, it might pay you to look for Abbot Thomas. Mayhap, the Abbot is not in France. He might even be locked in an Abbey dungeon. If I were you, I would search awhile!"

The witch tripped down the path like a deer. A moment later the brush hid her from sight.

CHAPTER XVIII. DEAN FLETCHER

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DEAN FLETCHER

IN WHICH IT APPEARS THAT A MAN OF PEACEABLE VOCATION MAY BECOME A MAN OF WAR, AND A CHAIN OF NOTABLE EVENTS LEADS THE DEAN OF THORNTON TO BRING TO THE ABBEY CERTAIN QUESTIONABLE AND MYSTERIOUS ALLIES

On the evening of the next day Dean Fletcher sat in the Deanery, and with him was a man booted and spurred and ready to ride. Dean Fletcher hardly seemed to be the Dean, for the stoop was largely gone from his shoulders, and his face was set with a resolution so strong and fiery that it almost seemed to unfrock him. The two men were ending a conference, and the mark of earnestness appeared in the word and demeanor of them both.

The Dean tore a strip of parchment into shreds.

"No; I will not hamper you with a dispatch," he said to his companion. "Should you be caught, the scrip might hang you. Word of mouth will be better. Ride to Lincoln forthwith, and furiously. Melt flint under your hoofs. Hire, borrow, or steal horses, as you may need, but gain the city as fast as horseflesh will carry you. Tell the Sheriff that we are attacked. The villeins will surely close in on us before morning. The Sheriff must ride with a strong troop and without delay,

or we be all dead men. The matter is most urgent. Ride man! Ride, for your life, and for ours!"

The two men hurried out. On the garth a lay Brother held a restive horse, saddled and bridled. The messenger took a bow and a full quiver from the lay Brother. He slung the bow across his back, hung the quiver on his belt behind his handy dagger, and sprang into the saddle. The Dean walked by the side of the horseman to the Gate House. As the man rode across the drawbridge, the Dean said, "If any shoot, halt not to return a single arrow. Time is too precious. Ride round a fight, not into it. Like the wind, ride to Lincoln; like the wind, bring back the Sheriff."

The horseman had not rounded the first turn in the road before Dean Fletcher was back across the bridge.

"Raise the draw," he commanded the man at the winch as he passed the tower. "Without due orders, lower it for nobody, coming in or going out." The bridge promptly raised behind him as he entered the archway. With steady, purposeful stride the Dean crossed the garth, straight toward his own house. On the Deanery steps he met Brothers Geoffrey and Benedict.

"Make ready for a siege," he cried. "Secure the provisions. More will be in before morning. Lock doors and bolt shutters. Let no one out or in. Assure the fearful of the Brethren that there is no danger. Boil water, melt lead, make ready fire balls. Monks can fight, methinks, as well

as villeins. I have sent for the Sheriff, and now I am off for other succor. Brother Geoffrey, I leave you in charge until I return."

Geoffrey and Benedict hurried away, the Dean's masterful spell upon them, and the Dean passed indoors. He went straight into his own room. Hastily he unlocked the oaken chest by his bed. At the pressure of his finger a secret drawer of the chest flew open, and the Dean seized a parchment that lay therein. Opening the parchment, he hurriedly glanced at its contents, then folded the document again and thrust it into his bosom, "It is but a bit of parchment," he mused. "Its reputation is said not to be of the best. They even say the courts may make a riddle of it! But 'tis a key to land, and the key is mine, as one day will be the land!"

Straightway the Dean passed from his house to the muniment room, in his strength disdaining to notice certain fearful monks scurrying across the garth to cover, like frightened partridges.

"The deed will be safer here," he said under his breath, as he unlocked the heavy, studded door. Inside, he glanced about upon the contents of the Abbey's strong room—rich treasure in silver and gold, and the hoarded legal parchments of the country side—and his eyes glittered with greedy appreciation, while the tip of his moist tongue glided two or three times across his mouth, peeping between his dry lips.

"Here the deed will be as safe as is the Humber

in its bed," he said. He leaned a ladder against a stack of pigeonholes, and, climbing to the top, laid his precious parchment in the most out-of-the-way receptacle close under the foot of the arched ceiling. Descending quickly to the floor, he barred the shutters of the two windows in the room, and then passed quickly out doors. "That makes the will secure," he said, as he locked the massive door. "Men-at-arms could not force it. Even if they win inside the Abbey, villeins will suck their bleeding knuckles at the door."

The Dean strode towards the Gate House, and the drawbridge lowered at his command.

"Raise the bridge after me, Brother Henry," he shouted toward the winch chamber as he passed. "Let no one in or out till I return, unless it be upon proper order from Brother Geoffrey, whom I leave in charge."

The Dean walked briskly down the road toward the forest. A mile or so from the Abbey he stopped at the corner of a pasture, and looked about, scrutinizing every direction to see that nobody spied his movements. When he had satisfied himself that he was unobserved, he put two fingers into his mouth, and blew a shrill whistle. A stallion grazing on the farther side of the paddock, lifted his head and looked about. Again the Dean whistled, and promptly the horse trotted toward him, his head proudly erect. A bridle and saddle lay in the brush. With no show of compunction, the Dean appropriated the convenient furnishings,

and quickly put them on the horse, doubtless feeling that the emergency justified his freedom with property not his own. Then he let down the bars, replacing them with some show of care, and led the horse into the road, where he mounted and lightly rode upon his way.

Dean Fletcher did not draw rein until he had galloped three full miles. Then he swerved his horse down an unfrequented lane, the entrance to which was overgrown with brush. A quarter of a mile down the winding road, the lane turned into a quaint steading, which was half hidden in a sharp ravine, and was naturally veiled from the road by thick underbrush. From among the trees peeped an old, thatched house, about which hung an air of desertion. Dilapidated farm-buildings, weather-worn and in ruins, clustered about the house, and huddled about the buildings stood the weathered remnants of ricks of hay and straw of a former year. The steading lay under the lea of a sharp wooded hill, and a limpid stream gurgled musically by the stack yard. The entire premises appeared to be deserted.

At the door of an old, broken-down stable, the Dean flung himself out of the saddle. He led his horse into the stable, and was tying the halter rope to the crib, when a man hurriedly descended a ladder from the loft, and appeared at the foot of the stall.

"By sonties, Tim, 'tis well you are here. Call your men quickly. There's work to be done," said the Dean, the while he finished tying the horse.

The man whistled, and a moment later, from every direction came men running into the barn—a score or more of men, all dressed like villeins, except that here and there a man wore Lincoln green. They all bore indubitable marks of the soil upon face, hands and dress, and were evidently familiar with the art of tilling land.

"Never was I so glad to see you, Jock," exclaimed the Dean, as a tall burly fellow, evidently the leader, pushed his way to the stall. " 'Tis well I found you all at home."

In low tones the two men conferred in the stall, and as he talked the Dean's hand automatically caressed the sleek hide of the horse. Meanwhile the men stood respectfully out of earshot, but ready, and intently watching their leader.

Presently, as Jock emerged from the stall, his face having caught fire from his conference with the Dean, the others promptly gathered about him for news.

"Hasten men!" he said, in the short sharp tones of accustomed command. "Load four wagons with provisions. Take all the wheat, flour, and pork we have on hand. We can get more! Load every bow, bow string, and arrow we have on the farm, and let each man go well armed. Take green along, carefully hidden, but wear russet. We go to help the Dean hold his new seat against the rising. Every man goes, but Tim. He will keep watch till we return. We're off in half an hour."

With orderly alacrity the men scattered to their

tasks, and the steading at once became a scene of bustling industry. Among the freight loaded into the wagons were a dozen bundles of unstrung bows. "Rare faggots, these!" said Jock, as he threw the bundles up to the men who packed them in the wagons. "They make a hot fire!"

In less than an hour the wagons were loaded with their peculiar merchandise and the men stood ready.

"Bring canvas coverings," said the Dean, laughing. "Dew might spoil flour!" Quickly the men blanketed the wagons with coarse covering, which effectually hid their contents from sight. "Let it rain, now, if it will!" said the Dean rubbing his hands.

"Two teamsters to a wagon," cried Jock. "One may ride the wagon, the other lead the front horse. Mind, too, that you walk on the near side! The rest of the fellows must hide among the sacks under cover, and keep strict silence! Not a word! No fighting till we be in the Abbey! If any accost us, we be villeins hauling produce to ship at the haven!"

Dean Fletcher sprang into the first wagon, and crouched under the cover against the front board.

"Trot wherever you can; time counts," he said to Jock, who sat just above him, driving the team.

"Mount, till we get into the road," cried Jock, and immediately the men afoot vaulted astride the leading horses. The drivers cracked their whips, and the horses started over the rough road at a pace that certainly would have been disastrous to regular merchandise.

At the main road the men on the leading horses dismounted, and the wagons slowed to a regular teaming pace. "If no one is in sight, trot down the hills," ordered the Dean, and Jock lifted his whip in token that he heard and would obey.

At a slow pace the wagons creaked down the dusty road. The full moon was cheating the land of its twilight, and the road was almost as light as day. Halfway to the Abbey, looking straight before him and cracking his whip as he spoke, Jock remarked to the Dean, "Villeins move about in the woods on either side. There be a host of them."

"Take care now," whispered the Dean from beneath the cover. "Attract no attention; create no suspicion. Drive straight on! We be villeins!"

With short intervals between them, the wagons lumbered along the road. Now and again a driver cracked his whip and shouted an objurgation to his horses. Wearily the sleepy teamsters in russet trudged at the heads of their teams.

Beyond a bend in the road, a hundred men in russet blocked the way. La Rue himself was at their head, and through a crack in the wagon Dean Fletcher saw Guilbert de Rouen moving about among groups of other men in the woods. "Steady, now!" whispered the Dean to Jock.

Jock raised his stentorian voice in the chant of the Miller's song, leaning back in his seat, and rollicking out the words with a zest that set the other teamsters and drivers singing. Ahead in

the road, La Rue's men took up the strain with a volume of enthusiasm which indicated that they understood the teamsters to be a part of the revolt.

"Brothers! Brothers, mine!" cried Jock as he came upon the men in the road. "You sing well, but drag. A little quicker; so!"

Jock stood up on the shafts, and again his voice rang out the famous song, but more sprightly and in quicker time, and La Rue's men caught his enthusiasm and sang with him.

"That's better! How goes the day? How many men have we?" Jock inquired, sweeping his looped whip over the forest.

"Hundreds in the woods, and more coming, hundreds every hour," answered La Rue. "We shall unfeather Dean Fletcher's nest by daybreak. Then shall we move promptly on Lincoln. 'Tis a glorious day, Brothers."

"Aye! Aye! We'll pluck some feathers!" responded Jock heartily. "We'll drink the People's health in Abbey wine, this very day! I would I had some Abbey wine now! Get up, Dolly! Robin, get up there, old horse!" He cracked his whip and flecked the lash on the horses' flanks until, greatly excited, the team reared and all but overturned the wagon in the road.

"When do you attack?" Jock continued, as the wagons got under way.

"At daybreak," La Rue replied.

"Glorious!" responded Jock. "Who would have thought that we would have lived to see this day!"

The villeins in the road opened, and the russet teamsters and their wagons passed through their russet brothers and left them standing in the way.

"That must be their advance guard," whispered the Dean a few minutes later. "We're well within their lines! Danger's passed! Better trot a bit!"

"Better be careful," answered Jock. "'Tis no time to whistle. Later, maybe, but not now! Lie quiet!"

Unperturbed, Jock held his pace even, cracking his whip carelessly every now and then, and singing the popular songs of the revolt as the wagons moved slowly down the road. Presently the grey walls of the Abbey appeared in view. Then the Dean clambered up beside Jock on the front board, as Jock whipped the horses into a gallop, so that the men afoot had hard work to keep up.

At the bridge the Dean sprang to the ground. "Drop the bridge, instantly!" he shouted to Henry in the tower. While the bridge slowly descended to its place across the moat, the Dean sprang to the top of a knoll, and anxiously scanned the forest fringe. Not a villein was in sight. The Dean rubbed his hands joyfully as the wagons rumbled over the bridge into the enclosure. Evidently, the villeins would not know that he had reinforcements within the Abbey.

On the garth, the Dean's auxiliaries tumbled out of the wagons hilariously, in fine humor at the success of the ruse. The monks gathered about them in open-mouthed amazement, unable as yet

to appreciate either the danger or the protection indicated by their presence in the Abbey. Out in the open the strange men put on Lincoln green over their russet smocks, cracking jokes and laughing boisterously while the monks looked on the transformation in sheer wonderment.

The Dean seemed master of the situation. Both monks and archers sprang to life under the spell of his leadership. "Post the sentries, Jock," he commanded. "Man the walls. See that the portcullis works. Shut and double-bar gates and doors. String all our bows for the Brotherhood. Monks will help with that. Distribute the arrows, keeping plenty for yourselves. Geoffrey, store in the cellar the provisions we brought. And you, Benedict, ring all the hours, as though nothing had happened. Count off a few Brothers with lusty voices, and let them sing the offices loudly. The tolling hours and the singing will make the villeins think that they catch us off our guard!"

It was now beyond midnight. The full moon bathed the Abbey with light almost as bright as day. Already a faint additional glow appeared on the horizon where later the sun would rise. The Dean went the rounds of the Abbey, assisting Jock to post sentries, and planning the defense with him. Monks hurried to and fro, awkward and nervous under the new and strange situation. Now and again the bell boomed solemnly in the tower, and the strains of chanting floated from the church over the Abbey and out into the forest.

When the twilight of the new morning and the moonlight of the departing night were equal, Dean Fletcher and Jock held an improvised school of archery on the garth, and a half dozen green archers assisted them to teach the monks how to use the bow. The Dean was masterful, and strove to infuse his spirit into the Brotherhood. To hearten the Brethren, when a Brother's excessive awkwardness had provoked the burly Jock to profanity, the Dean himself would take a bow.

"You must hold the bow in your hand, thus," he would say. In the Dean's hand the bow would spring into life, as though it felt the magic touch of Robin Hood. "Now! See? Draw the arrow clear to its head, bring the feather back to your ear, thus; having a care to hold both bow and arrow steady! Aim well, Brother Frederick, and be not in too big a hurry. Let the arrow go with a springy motion, —so!" and the Dean's arrow would cleave the mark, or so near would it come to the mark that Lincoln green could scarce forbear a cheer, forgetting for the moment the villeins in the woods.

The Dean was a fighter! With the villeins swarming in yonder woods it was good to have such a leader, and the Brotherhood took courage, and felt a sense of satisfaction that Father Fletcher and not Father Thomas was their Abbot in this day of trouble; not knowing, in their blindness, that with Father Thomas in the Abbot's chair, their house had been as safe from attack as is a nest from plunder in Paradise.

Leaving Jock to coach the monks in the art of archery, Dean Fletcher walked briskly to the drawbridge. In the tower, half a dozen men in green stood by Henry at the winch, intently watching the forest line through the loopholes.

"Aught stirring?" eagerly queried the Dean.

"Neither twig, nor man!"

"They're a tardy soldiery!" answered the Dean. "And we are well forehanded! Mark me, Brother Henry. Lower the bridge, and let it stay down. Go you, sit on the bench on the parapet out in the open, and feign sleep. Do you, Will Long,"—speaking to a tall man in green—"stand, ready, by the winch. Doubtless, seeing the bridge down, they will try to rush it. When they start, raise the bridge quickly—then give them arrows,—plenty of them, well and strongly aimed."

In apparent confidence, the Dean passed cheerily to the upper chamber over the Gate House. There, half a dozen monks stood about a green archer who examined the winch of the portcullis.

"Is everything clear below, John?" asked the Dean.

The man peered out, then nodded. Whereupon the Dean pulled a lever, and the portcullis crashed down its grooves, and ground into the pavement under the arch. "It works well, and responds quickly," exclaimed the Dean. "Wind it to its recess again, and set the catch ready."

Dean Fletcher continued his rounds. Winding down the turret steps, he said unto him-

self, "La Rue and Guilbert de Rouen will have a surprise for breakfast!" He laughed softly as he passed out and joined Jock among the monks on the garth.

CHAPTER XIX.
THE APPRENTICES OF MARS

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IN WHICH MONK AND VILLEIN JOIN AN ISSUE ON A BLOODY FIELD, AND DEAN FLETCHER, HIS MONKS, AND HIS ALLIES, LONG FOR THE SHERIFF OR FOR NIGHT

The woods outside the Abbey swarmed with armed men. At crossroads over half the country side, Jack had met Hob, also many a Will, Tom, Bill, Tim, Walt and Jim. They had clapped each other hilariously on the back, sworn strange new oaths of fellowship, talked over the good times nigh at hand, and ever and anon had livened the night with stanzas from Piers the Plowman—ever converging toward Thornton as they marched, and ever joined by other russet groups, and by still others, all moving toward the Abbey at Thornton, and all bound by the same solemn pact.

"See that the men be silent, and keep cover," commanded La Rue, early in the night. "Let no man show himself toward the Abbey. A surprise will win us the fight—mayhap, without bloodshed."

Martin Reeve and Jack Shepherd ran in opposite directions to pass the command along, and Guilbert de Rouen and Brother Barr sat upon a fallen tree, and discussed with La Rue details of the attack.

In a little while the Dwarf returned with Martin,

and Guilbert called the two aside. "Martin," he said earnestly, "Once within the Abbey, assist the Dwarf to find the stolen Manor deed. The Dwarf thinks it is in the chest in the Dean's bedroom. A reward for you, if you find the will! Bring it to me, or see that it is destroyed."

The Dwarf grinned his satisfaction, and stood on his head at the happy prospect.

A bell boomed from the Abbey tower, and the villeins danced with glee. "The monks are going to prayer," Russet said. "They know not that they have visitors so close! We will set the Dean a-chanting new tunes."

Guilbert smiled on the villeins' simple-minded hilarity. They were like children playing at war, and did not know how serious might be the consequences. Presently Jack Shepherd returned from a reconnaissance, and the leaders gathered to listen to his report.

"The Abbey bell tolls regularly, and the monks sing psalms as though it were Christmas! The drawbridge is down, and Brother Henry is fast asleep. His head lops on his breast, and I swear I heard him snore!"

La Rue laughed, and immediately he issued his final orders.

Shortly the woods came to life. Cautiously and silently the villeins crept to the edge of the clearing, like beasts of prey stalking an unsuspecting victim. The morning twilight looked into the wan faces of close upon a thousand men, massed in the woods

and waiting the command to dash upon the Gate House.

"One grand rush, and the priests' nest is ours," cried La Rue, springing to the open. "Now! Altogether! Follow me!"

Shouting wildly, "The Fellowship! The Fellowship!" and tossing their greasy caps high in the air, the villeins sprang into the open after La Rue. Precisely at that moment the drawbridge commenced to rise. When the frantic, shouting villeins reached the moat, the bridge was fifteen feet in the air, and was still ascending. At the head of their men, La Rue and Guilbert halted on the edge of the moat, looking impotently over thirty feet of water. The iron teeth of the portcullis grinned at them over the moat from under the arch of the gateway, in silent mockery of their helpless chagrin.

"Back, men! Back! In heaven's name, back, I say," shouted La Rue, all but pushed into the water by the pressure of his men. The onrush had thrown a dozen villeins into the moat. In the nick of time, when chagrin and confusion had bereft the men of purpose, hidden archers poured a flight of arrows into the shouting, swaying mass. Then archers in Lincoln green ran along the parapets, and, at short range, shot their arrows into the confused crowd. Dazed and crazed, the mob broke, and fled helter-skelter across the clearing, leaving half a dozen dead in the open—strangely quiet, and huddled on the grass in limp disheveled

heaps, stained with sickening blood, the horrid first fruits of revolt.

Under cover of the wood the leaders rallied the rout. It was no easy task. Curiosity as to where Dean Fletcher had secured his green archers speedily gave place to practical discussion of the immediate situation. Outwardly, Guilbert maintained his courage, though he was sick at heart. The villeins were so ill clad, so hungry, so dirty, and, worse than all beside, their weapons were so nondescript. Sickles, scythes, bladeless snaths, kitchen knives, axes, spades, pitchforks, mattocks, hoes and picks, lay strewn about the forest in hopeless confusion, where the men had thrown them as they had gained cover.

"Pick up your arms, men," shouted Guilbert. Mechanically, the men obeyed. But what a sight it was! Shepherds brandished harmless crooks. Many a plowman could only crack his whip to swell the din of war, and some of the men bore naught more warlike than the stout quarterstaves with which they had been wont to wage alehouse war at village fairs.

"Only an abbot of misrule would be fool enough to war with such troops!" exclaimed Guilbert to La Rue, bitterly. That wily agitator had only time to smile on Guilbert's discouragement, as he dashed from group to group, getting the men back into line.

Occasionally, here and there in the motley throng Guilbert caught the gleam of pike, a halberd, or a sword, borne by some man who had served in the

French wars, while perhaps a hundred men carried bows and arrows. These scattered men and their arms were Guilbert's only ray of hope.

"Gather me every man who has served in France," said Guilbert to Martin Reeve. "Rally every bow and spear in the woods. I'll meet you under yonder elm when the sun is higher by an hour."

It was Guilbert's plan that shortly brought the woods to order. At his command, a company of the unarmed men raided the neighboring steadings. Later they returned, pushing before them a score or more of empty carts.

"The shovels! Here, shovels!" shouted La Rue. The men with shovels ran in, and speedily had half filled the carts with gravel and stones.

Then the sound of axes rang through the forest, echoing so loudly that it must have set a-guessing Dean Fletcher and his green archers in the Abbey. The villeins felled trees, plying their axes as for dear life. They lopped off and chopped small the branches, and mowed down underbush, and withed the twigs into large faggots, which they loaded high and wide on the carts, on top of the gravel ballast.

"Push the carts ahead, men!" commanded La Rue. "Six men to a shaft, to hold the cart steady. The rest, shove where you can."

Pushed by the men, the carts moved slowly but steadily to the edge of the clearing towards the Abbey.

Guilbert de Rouen reviewed Martin Reeve's nondescript veterans, and at sight of them his

blood quickened. "They'll do!" he exclaimed to Martin, who was as proud of his ragamuffins as though they had been a victorious army. "Hold them ready! Everything depends on them. The rest have neither arms nor experience. Put your best bowmen to the front. Bid them take good aim, and to shoot only at a living mark. See that they keep cover."

At the word of command the carts moved out into the open, directly toward the Gate House, where the drawbridge still pointed to the sky, and where the green archers watched and waited.

"Men-at-arms," commanded Guilbert—and his voice rang out clear and strong, spreading confidence—"advance under cover of the carts. You who push the carts, take care that you do not expose yourselves. Any man wounded before we reach the draw—I'll cut off his foolish head! Advance, straight but slowly toward the moat to the right of the drawbridge."

The strange procession started, apparently of its own accord. From the Gate House, not a man showed among the carts. It was as though the loads of green wood advanced automatically toward the moat. A flight of arrows spent itself among the carts, and their whizzing through the air, followed by sharp twangs as they quivered harmlessly in the wood, or, wide of their mark, stuck aslant in the greensward among the carts, raised a derisive cheer among the men under cover. Half way across the clearing the suppressed feeling

of the villeins broke out into a wild chant. Weird and slow, and quaintly set to a minor key, the song fell on the Abbey walls:

"Piers the Plowman was painted all bloody,
And came in with a cross before the common people.
And right like, in all limbs, to our Lord Jesus:
And then called I Conscience to tell me the truth.
'Is this Jesus the Jouster?' quoth I, 'that Jews did to death,
Or is it Piers the Plowman?—who is painted so red?'"

Suddenly both the spirit and the chant changed, as though over the keyboard of tragedy a subtle hand had drawn a deeper and a fuller stop. From a minor, the song swung into a major key. With wild enthusiasm, backed by a thrilling volume of sound, the Miller's chant broke forth from among the carts, as they slowly approached the moat.

"John the Miller he hath ground small, small, small,
The King's Son of heaven he shall pay for all.
Beware, or ye be woe,
Know your friend from your foe.
Have enough, and say 'ho!'
And do well, and better flee sin,
And seek peace and hold therein.
And so bid John Trueman and all his fellows."

"A murrain on your damned Miller," cried Dean Fletcher, stepping out on the walk above the gate. "A millstone about your leathery necks shall you all have, and that right soon!"

The waspy whiz of an arrow cut short the imprecation, and the Dean sprang to cover, bearing with him a slit through his hood as hardy evidence of Russet's good markmanship.

Half a dozen green archers stepped out upon the parapet, intent upon retaliation. "Twang! Twang! Twang!" from under and among the carts! Two of the archers lurched forward over the low parapet, and their bodies thudded on the pavement below. Their fellows scurried after the Dean to cover, and a cheer from the villeins ended the Miller's chant among the carts like a strange "Amen."

The front row of carts was now close to the moat, near to the upraised drawbridge, and Dean Fletcher was beside himself with rage. As the cart but one nearest the bridge came to the edge of the moat, the Dean stood stock still, transfixed with what he saw. Under cover of the cart nearest the bridge, the villeins pushed the second cart into the moat, and its ballast promptly sank it, so that the top of the faggots rested almost level with the bank. Then, apparently of its own accord, the next cart wheeled into the moat over its predecessor. Cart after cart the villeins cleverly pushed thus into the moat, until a solid bridge of faggots spanned from shore to shore, and from the ample shelter of the carts still remaining on dry land the villeins raised cheer after cheer. To vent his rage Dean Fletcher stepped to a loophole and shot an arrow with force enough to have transfixed two men, but the shaft merely splintered idly in a wheel, as though it would mock its ecclesiastical archer, who so far forgot himself as to punctuate his disgust with a good round oath.

The last cart had not fully settled into its place

when Martin Reeve, with a dozen men hard at his heels, dashed across the faggot bridge—the closeness of the bridge to the walls effectually screening the men from the Dean's archers. Promptly Martin led his men under the drawbridge, and shortly their axes rang out on the woodwork underneath the bridge. Presently, with a deafening crash, the bridge fell into its place across the moat, amid cries of rage from within and of triumph from without. La Rue charged across the bridge while it yet trembled, a full hundred men at his heels, shouting and brandishing their weapons. Through a flight of arrows they gained the gateway in a dash for the enclosure, which was plainly in sight. Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, the portcullis crashed to the pavement, pinioning two bundles of writhing russet, bespattering the floor with warm slippery blood, and missing La Rue himself only by a miracle.

La Rue turned to his men. "Bring up the load of dry faggots," he cried. Presently, the loaded cart was pushed close to the portcullis. Flint and steel speedily set the faggots afire. The draught sucked the flames through the portcullis, and made of the archway a huge chimney through which smoke and flames poured into the garth. The Dean massed his men for the defense of the gate, and prepared for the rush which he knew would follow as soon as the flames had eaten through the portcullis.

In the meanwhile, under cover of the excitement

incident to the fire, Brother Barr had led a company of men to the rear of the Abbey, with ladders to scale the wall. Presently a wild cry—on the one hand a shout of victory, and on the other a bitter wail of despair, arose within the Abbey. A score of monks ran pellmell to Dean Fletcher at the gate.

"They are in! The villeins are in, and they are burning the Abbey!" they cried.

This new peril in the rear transfigured Dean Fletcher with the full spirit of Mars. With his fingers he blew a shrill whistle, the effect of which on Lincoln green was nothing short of marvelous. Wherever they were and whatever they were doing, forthwith the green archers rallied to the Dean by the fountain. Dean Fletcher led his archers and his monks in a furious charge across the garth, till they came upon Brother Barr's men fighting among the graves at the rear of the enclosure. Then came the shock of battle, with no intervening walls to aid assailants or assailed. It was man to man, and blow for blow, the passion and lust for war fanned to fiercer heat by personal contact of antagonist with antagonist,—a hot contest of strength and fury and frenzy, as well as of skill in personal encounter. Barr's insurgents were picked men of bill and bow, and withal, they were well armed. On many a French field most of them had had their baptism of fire. They halted the Dean's charge, and gradually fought him and his men backward.

Then did the wily Dean change his tactics. He scattered his men for cover into the surrounding

buildings. From these coigns of vantage the green archers and the monks showered their arrows upon the insurgents with such deathly effect that Brother Barr's victory was checked. For a while neither party scored advantage. But the sun glided a couple of hours toward the west, and, as the Dean was really fighting for time, the advantage was distinctly his, and he moistened his lips in satisfaction, the while he fought and waited.

The fight at the rear of the Abbey had left the Gate House without adequate defense, and it was here that Guilbert de Rouen turned back the tide of the Dean's victory. While the Dean was busy with Brother Barr, Guilbert ordered the remnant of the fire to be dragged away from the portcullis, and into its place the villeins blithely pushed a tall load of green faggots. From the top of the faggots, Ralph Shepherd and a companion scaled the parapet above the gate. Thence the door was open to the windlass of the portcullis. The two men turned the ponderous machinery, and their eager friends below watched the portcullis slowly rise in its grooves. Then with a wild cry of triumph the tide of war surged into the cloister garth.

From the porch of the Abbot's House, whence he was directing the defense, Dean Fletcher heard the triumphant yell, followed immediately by the tramp of many feet upon the pavement. For a moment he was paralyzed. He cast a nervous glance at the shadows, to note the hour of the sun. Then he blew his strange whistle again. When his green archers

had closed about him, he led monk and yeoman in a dash for the Chapter House. Once inside, the monks closed the ponderous doors, and made security doubly secure by dropping into their places the stout iron bars.

La Rue set a strong guard to watch the Chapter House, and the rest of the villeins scattered over the Abbey in search of food and plunder.

The Dwarf appeared before Martin Reeve, who was eating a mutton pasty as he sat on a stone bench in a corner of the cloister.

"Come," said the Dwarf, waving his hand toward the Deanery.

"Have a bite!" Martin answered, generously halving the pasty. The Dwarf grinned, and fell upon his share of the feast. They had not swallowed the last mouthful, when the Dwarf led the way into the Dean's house. They found the house empty, and the chest by the bed securely locked. Martin looked at the Dwarf quizzically, as though to say, "What next?"

By way of answer, the Dwarf swung his axe upon the chest, once, twice,—a dozen times in sharp rhythmic succession, and then the Dean's treasure box lay open. The chest proved to be all but empty.

"'Tis in the locker," the Dwarf muttered to Martin. But he ran his hand among the contents of the locker without coming upon the object of his search.

"There is a secret drawer," he muttered unto

himself. But his fingers failed to touch the hidden spring. Again he swung his axe, this time splintering the locker, and at the third blow the secret drawer flew wide open. But, alas! the drawer was empty!

"Saint Satan!" exclaimed the Dwarf, as he sat upon the bed by Martin.

His countenance was so woe-begone that Martin cried, "Cheer up, old fellow!" and slapped him on the back, with apparently but little effect, for the Dwarf still sat in a brown study.

Suddenly the Dwarf sprang to his feet, and shot out of doors, Martin following hard after him, laughing and exclaiming under his breath, "The queer misshapen spitfire! Where next? Hades, I reckon!"

The Dwarf made straight for the muniment room. The villeins were swarming about the closed door like angry bees. The Dwarf stood a moment wrapped in thought. Presently, he made straight for a young elm that grew upon the garth, and a crowd of villeins followed at his heels, divining that his movements were likely to solve the difficulty of the bolted and barred door. His axe rang out on the tree, and when the tree was felled, a dozen axes lopped off its branches close to the bole. Forty stalwarts seized the tree and bore it off to the muniment room, where the Dwarf mounted a low wall, and from that coign of vantage directed the movements of the men.

"One! Two! Ready! Go!—One! Two! Ready!

Go!—One! Two! Ready! Go!" cried the Dwarf, slowly, motioning with his hands and body. As he gave the word, the butt of the elm battered against the door, blow after blow, steady, ponderous, and with cumulative effect, accompanied by the lusty cheers of the villeins.

Through the labors of four shifts of men, in an hour's time the massive door was battered down. Then followed an awful pandemonium of vandalism. Amid the wildest confusion, every man carried from the building whatever he could lay his hands upon, and bore his plunder to the garth, where he threw it on the huge bonfire which the villeins had kindled.

The Dwarf and Martin gained the inside of the muniment room, and the ladder immediately caught the Dwarf's eye. It was just as Dean Fletcher had left it. "Hold the ladder," he shouted in Martin's ear. "Don't let the fools kick it from under me!" Martin nodded, and the Dwarf mounted to the ceiling. He ran his hand among the recesses at the top of the stack, and out of the fourth hole drew the stolen Manor House will! Very quickly he descended the ladder, almost beside himself with joy. He halted at the door long enough to identify the parchment, Martin looking on curiously over his shoulder.

"This will roast the Dean's goose," exclaimed the Dwarf, and Martin chuckled. Then in great leaps and bounds, waving the parchment triumphantly in the air, as though it were a signal flag, highly

intoxicated with the successful termination of his long quest, the Dwarf ran across the garth to the crackling fire, and tossed the precious document onto the pile. Then, like two foolish children, the Dwarf and Martin joined hands, and swung into the circle of hilarious ignorant vandals who danced about the destroying fire as though it were a Maypole on a village green.

Suddenly, like a flash of lightning out of a clear sky, the Dean and his green archers broke through the circle of dancers, stretching half a dozen of them upon the sward. In the twinkling of an eye, the Dean himself snatched the smoked and scorched parchment out of the fire and rescuing from the flames at the same time a rare copy of Boccaccio, turned to fight his way back.

By this time the villeins had rallied. La Rue and Brother Barr rushed upon the scene, and there ensued a hand-to-hand conflict, in which sheer weight of numbers pushed the Dean and his men toward the Chapter House. Half a dozen times the Dean himself was down. His face and habit were stained with blood, and there was a look on his face which was not good to see. Thrice Martin Reeve shot at the fighting Dean at short range, but not an arrow stuck even in his habit.

"'Tis fell magic!" Martin exclaimed, as the Dean stood, unharmed, on the top step by the Chapter House door, triumphantly waving the charred will a moment before his comrades drew him inside, and then bolted and barred the door.

Until evening the villeins held the Dean prisoner in the Chapter House. Then suddenly the Sheriff's horn winded loud and clear from the wood. The effect was magic. Promptly the villeins beat a hasty retreat across the garth, through the Gate House, and over the moat, where, like silent shadows, they disappeared in the edge of the forest.

Not less strangely did the Sheriff's horn effect the Dean's green archers. From the half dozen green dead the Dean himself promptly stripped their outer green garments. Every archer also promptly divested himself of Lincoln green, and, appearing in russet, mingled with the villeins as they disappeared from the Abbey, and so were lost to sight.

CHAPTER XX.
THE TURN OF A FAR-EBBED TIDE

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IN WHICH THE SINGULAR EXERCISE OF A GREAT HEART BY GUILBERT DE ROUEN COMPLICATES THAT GOOD MAN'S AFFAIRS, AND THREATENS THE DEAN OF THORNTON WITH DISASTER; AND THE END OF THE DAY'S PERIL IS NOT YET IN SIGHT

During the fight within the Abbey, when Dean Fletcher and his green archers were shut up in the Chapter House, shortly after the Dean had won back the stolen will, there came upon Guilbert a natural reaction from the stress of the conflict. To his sober sense the People's Cause seemed further from triumph in this hour of victory than it did when russet priests simply preached the Brotherhood in barns and midnight conventicles. Physical weariness may have been the foundation of the revulsion that sobered him, or it may be that it was merely his fundamental peace-loving self, coming to its own again after the fierce turmoil of the day. Almost wishing the attack had not been made, or that it had been less successful, with the stream of hungry villeins he drifted toward the Refectory. A builder by instinct, he hated to see these sons of destruction let loose among centuries of slow achievement in brick and stone,

even though he was in complete sympathy with the underlying spirit that set their hands to tear and destroy.

Hilarity in the Refectory touched Guilbert's sense of humor, and set him right again with himself and the world. The boisterous spirit of the Abbot of Misrule had laid hold on the laity whose feet were under the monks' table, and whose fingers were literally in the monks' pie. Mine host of the Saracen's Head occupied the Abbot's chair at the head of one board, and in the Dean's accustomed place at the head of the other long table sat Martin Reeve; each in a posture of mock dignity, gravely endeavoring to reduce to order the riotous laity who occupied the canons' places all a-down the board.

"My master Dean," quoth the burly Abbot, as Guilbert came in at the door, "'tis time that you should say grace. Quiet you, rusty brethren mine, while the Dean says grace!"

"Say grace yourself, you lazy lout," the uncanonical Dean shouted back. "Display less ignorance when you speak, or keep your mouth forever shut. Everybody knows that 'tis the Abbot's place to say grace. That's just what he's for, and all he's for!" The board yelled nonpartisan encouragement to both disputants.

"Nay, you do but show a yellow pup's pedigree when thus you speak," retorted the pseudo-Abbot, above the babel of laughter. "Stand you up in your place, and say grace for these hungry diners,

or, by the good St. Julian, we'll send you on the long journey,"—and he arose, pretending the while that he would go over to the Dean's table to enforce with his poniard his interpretation of Abbotly authority.

Which of the hilarious twain would, in the end, have said grace, or whether either would have gone so far as to profane that priestly function, may not be known, for Guilbert cried, "Fall to, my merry men. There's more to do. Eat and run!" And Russet the more readily obeyed Guilbert's command, in that it was too hungry to enjoy humor were it too fine, or too prolonged.

Guilbert hastily washed down the leg of a capon with a horn of Abbey brew, and passed out to note conditions in the enclosure. The Chapter House was securely sealed with a cordon of watchers and for the first time since the attack began Guilbert took a moment's rest. He sat down on a stone bench in the south cloister.

A resting body may well denote an active mind. Guilbert's thoughts sped far a-field, wondering what might follow the day's adventure, until his eye happened to rest upon the steps leading to the portico of the Abbot's house. Abbot Thomas! Strange that he had not thought of him during the day. Weightier matters had crowded out of his mind the quest imposed by Heloise, and enforced by the Keelby witch. He would forthwith espy how cosily the Dean had ensconced himself in his absent enemy's house. It might be that

he would thereby discover some cue to the Abbot's whereabouts.

Guilbert crossed the garth toward the Abbot's house, and as he passed he spoke cheerily to the men guarding the Chapter House, thereby encouraging them to faithful watch. As he stepped on to the portico of the Abbot's House, he noticed that the front door of the house was broken down, and debris of the conflict lay scattered about. But, strange to say, there was no evidence that there had been a struggle inside the house. Evidently, there had been no defense from within. The party that had battered the door had evidently found the house empty. How strange that Dean Fletcher had made no defense of his newly acquired residence!

Guilbert passed into the hall. A confusion of foot marks in the dust near the door, but extending no farther inward, indicated that the men who had broken open the Abbot's House had found it uninhabited, and had therefore turned back toward the conflict in the cloisters. Guilbert's curiosity was becoming aroused. He explored the Abbot's parlor and sitting room. Floor and furniture were dust-covered, but undisturbed. The house was deserted, and Guilbert's footfall echoed almost uncannily in the corridor. Not a thing appeared to have been touched since the Abbot had left.

It seemed strange to Guilbert that the Dean had not taken possession of the Abbot's House. Was it a touch of admirable modesty that kept the Dean

out of the Abbot's residence until he should actually have become Abbot? Meditating on the strange situation, Guilbert crossed the hall into the kitchen. No evidence of life showed there. He opened the kitchen door leading into the corridor. It was in his mind to glance into the Abbot's bedroom, and then away to—

Strange! very strange!—there was no bedroom door! Instead of the door he saw only solid stone and mortar! How strange! How very strange! Guilbert had been through that door into the Abbot's bedroom scores of times while he had been at work at the Abbey. Yes, and there, now, before his very eyes, the fluted archway of the old door stood out flush with the wall, while within the arch was new masonry! What could it mean? Why had the door been changed? Probably, either the Abbot or the Dean had changed the door from the corridor to the sitting room. Yes, that would be all right! A very good change! It would certainly be more convenient to enter the bedroom from the sitting room than from the corridor. But Guilbert wondered why he had not heard of the change; why, in fact, he had not been called upon to make the change.

His interest in the matter having been aroused, Guilbert determined to examine the workmanship of the new door. For that purpose he passed down the corridor into the sitting room. No change appeared there! He pushed aside the arras the whole length of the wall that divided the sitting

room from the bedroom. No opening was there! Then, slowly and painfully, the possibility of the whole foul, damnable truth dawned upon his mind!

"The sleek, cruel, crafty devil," Guilbert muttered between set teeth, as he sank into a settee, weak from the sudden vision of the Dean's possible crime. "To think that ambition and hatred should sink to such infernal warfare!"

It was but a moment that Guilbert sat there, breathing in quick nervous gasps, and clutching an arm of the settee. Memory opened to him a door of action. In a flash he remembered his encounter with the Dean in the wood. Almost as audibly as though they were again spoken, the Dean's words came back to Guilbert—"When the stone walls of Thornton shout their secrets in the public ear."

"My God!" cried Guilbert. "That is it! 'Stone walls, and secrets!' Oh, the damnable wretch! By the Eternal, the walls shall shout their secret in the public ear!"

Guilbert was on his feet now, breathing hard and deep, resolute, every nerve tense, and defiant of the Dean and his evil machinations. With the recollection of the Dean's hot words had opportunely come the memory of the secret passage from the south transept to the Abbot's House, which he had accidentally discovered a year ago.

" 'Tis a Providence!" he said, as he arose to go. A few long quick strides carried Guilbert back

to the portico, where the surge of war met his eye and ear. The siege of the Chapter House was in full progress, and occasional shafts from either party made the intervening space debatable and dangerous ground. Guilbert beckoned to Martin Reeve, and that sturdy retainer elbowed his way through the crowd, till Guilbert met him at the south cloister porch of the church with the words, "Go tell La Rue to keep a steady eye on the Chapter House. We'll burn the black crows in their nest, yet. Then come back to me here as quickly as you can."

Martin opened wide his eyes at the passionate fire that had taken possession of Guilbert, so unlike the usual quiet self-possession of the man, and then he promptly ran upon his errand.

Guilbert ascended the belfry tower, and found there a torch in the same ring that had yielded one to his hand a year ago. When Martin returned, Guilbert was standing at the foot of the stairway, the trap door open, about to take the first steps of the descent into the subterranean darkness.

"Go we down to Hell?" queried Martin, not without a strong touch of apprehension, to the humor of which the honest fellow was entirely oblivious.

"It may be! But come! You have your poniard? Come," repeated Guilbert, and he led the way down the steps. There was naught for Martin to do but follow. Crossing himself devoutly to forfend any evil that might be immanent, Martin plunged after the flickering torch into the darkness.

In the passage Guilbert's mind worked quickly and with great intensity. The Dean's sneering taunt came back to him with tremendous force. Why should he, of all men, trouble himself about the absent Abbot? But the suggestion fell far short of being a temptation, and he pushed on his quest without an instant's hesitation. Perhaps the Abbot was dead. In all probability he was dead. The thought quickened Guilbert's pace, for were the Abbot alive, every minute was precious. Guilbert had taken a wrong turn in the passage. He retraced his steps with haste, and turned eagerly in the right direction. He almost ran, so eager was he to reach his dismal goal. Then the Dean surged into his mind, and Guilbert clutched the torch vengefully and hurried on. It had gone ill with the Dean had Guilbert met him in the passage. It seemed good to Guilbert to have it in his power to checkmate the wicked man, and, dead or alive, the resurrection of the Abbot would certainly expose the Dean's crime.

Then, like the brush of an angel's wing, came the memory of Heloise's appeal to him in behalf of the missing Abbot. He was now upon her quest, and his love for Heloise seemed to shed light in, and to sweeten the subterranean passage. With his mind a-fire, he threaded the tortuous passage, expecting shortly to step into the Abbot's sealed tomb. Then a great dread fell upon him. He staggered, and leaned against the wall—the adventure was so impossible, and so ghostly.

The uncanny aspect of the venture old Martin had felt from the first, though he was ignorant of the facts which lay behind Guilbert's actions. Prodigiously perplexed, Martin made sundry silent appeals to the entire calendar of saints, as he followed Guilbert step by step, like the faithful soldier that he was. He held himself ready for any emergency, and crossed himself at frequent intervals, halting his devotions long enough at times to hurl appropriate imprecations toward the foe in the Chapter House, at the Dean who had again gotten possession of the Manor House deed and against all who impeded Brotherhood in the land.

At length Guilbert found and lifted the trap. There was little or no draught this time to endanger the torch. The air in the chamber was as close as that in the passage, and had an added fetid taint, which Guilbert did not stop to identify. To all appearance the room was as deserted as the rest of the house. Save for a faint light that haunted the narrow splay near the ceiling, the flickering torch in Guilbert's hand was the only light the room contained. Before the advent of the torch the room must have been wrapped in the gloom of the tomb, with Death haunting it like a Presence. With a feeling of impotent rage Guilbert noted the outline of the window showing distinctly around the fresh masonry. That fact confirmed his theory of foul play. The door of the bedroom was closed, and when, a moment later, Guilbert tried the knob, the door proved to be locked.

It took but a moment for these details to fix themselves in Guilbert's mind. Guilbert was coming to his feet now, and Martin was clambering out of the trap door close behind him, his eyes wide with astonishment at this queer and unexpected termination of the passage. Guilbert searched the floor with his eye, and was astonished to find no trace of the Abbot. He wondered whether the Abbot had escaped down the subway, or whether after all, Dean Fletcher had halted short of the actual immuration of his rival. But why, then, the bricked up door and window?

Guilbert was beginning to feel some slight sense of relief from the bare possibility that the latter view might be correct, when Martin pulled his sleeve. Guilbert turned nervously, for the situation had in it enough of the uncanny to touch the most steady nerves. Martin, sturdy seasoned man-at-arms though he was, was trembling like an aspen. His face was ashen, his eyes bulged, his mouth was wide open, and his index finger pointed dramatically over the foot of the bed. "There! Look! O! My God!" were the only words that escaped his lips, and these he whispered hoarsely.

Guilbert's eyes followed the index of Martin's finger. There on the bed lay a disordered pile of crumpled clothing curled into a circular heap, much in the shape of a dog that had made his bed in the grass.

The strange sight chilled Guilbert, but it also thrilled him. Very quietly he stepped to the side



FINDING THE ABBOTT.

of the bed, moving lightly as in the presence of the dead. He lifted a fold of the clothing, which happened to be the hood of the Abbot's gown, and the torch flickered on the pale, emaciated, shrunken face of Abbot Thomas. Strange was it that the face was not discolored. Decomposition had not yet set in. Not long, then, had the Abbot been dead. Guilbert reached a steel mirror that lay on the table by the water jug, and when he had wiped the dust from it with his sleeve, he held it close to the dead man's lips, scrutinizing it closely the while. A faint dimness gathered upon the polished surface! The fact put life into Guilbert's actions. "Bring water, quick!" he exclaimed, the passion for saving life full upon him.

A moment later the dreadful empty, hollow sound from the water jug, and then from the ewer, as Martin handled them, told Guilbert that they contained no water. Long ago the Abbot had drained the last drop. Guilbert ground his teeth. "We must bear him out to light and air," said he.

Now that there was something to do for what appeared to be flesh and blood, the uncanny feeling departed from Martin Reeve. While Martin busied himself arranging the Abbot for the journey down the subway, Guilbert had time to note that the candle had burnt down into the socket before the crucifix on the table, and that the Abbot's Breviary lay open on the bed at, "A Prayer for the Forsaken and Dying." If the Abbot had gone on the long journey, he had taken the stirrup cup from the Breviary, and

had started out under the forms and sanctions of the great church of which Dean Fletcher and his worlding monks were most unworthy members.

The nature of their burden and the need for extra care made the passage down the subway slow and difficult. Guilbert took care to close both traps, and to enjoin secrecy upon Martin, both as to the existence of the subway and as to the events in which he had taken part. When they came to daylight with their burden the fire was still blazing on the garth, and the villeins were celebrating their emancipation from serfdom in their Maypole dance.

Guilbert sped Martin for trusty help, and shortly the bowman returned with Ralph Shepherd and another retainer of the Manor House. They constructed a litter of banner staves which Martin foraged from the Sacristy, and bore the Abbot down the nave, through the western door, out between the avenue of young elms, and so on through the New Gate House to the woods beyond. Those who noted the party at all thought that they carried a wounded man to the rear, and passed on, asking no questions. When they came to the brook Guilbert dashed water into the Abbot's face. At the shock the Abbot opened his eyes a moment, and a faint moan escaped him. Guilbert forced a little water between his lips, and moving on, halted not until he had borne the Abbot into the Manor House. Then the Sheriff's horn winded from the south, and Guilbert knew that the Sheriff and his men were drawing nigh.

CHAPTER XXI.
A PRISONER OF VENGEANCE

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A PRISONER OF VENGEANCE

WHICH MAKES DUE RECORD OF A NOTABLE ARREST, AND SETS FORTH HOW A CERTAIN DUNGEON BECAME A FIELD WHEREON TWO MEN CONTENDED WITHOUT THE LETTING OF BLOOD, AND NEITHER ANTAGONIST GAINED A SIGNAL VICTORY

With mighty strides, Guilbert de Rouen recrossed the courtyard, and walked toward the drawbridge, having left the Abbot in the great hall of the Manor House. Martin Reeve and his two companions followed close at Guilbert's heels.

"Halt men! Stay you here!" commanded Guilbert, turning upon the three. "No need that you should help to bulge the Sheriff's net!"

Martin doffed his cap, awkwardly, and said: "You stay, too, captain. The day's well lost. You're worth more than a hundred men of russet."

"Nay! Nay!" answered Guilbert, promptly disposing of both Martin's temptation and his appreciation.

"Then go we back with you! When the Sheriff bags you, we will bear you company," retorted Martin doggedly.

"By thunder! No!" answered Guilbert, simulating anger. "I command you to stay to guard the Manor House. After I have helped the villeins

to scatter, I will return. Stay you here—I command you, soldier to soldier."

Under his breath, old Martin swore a round oath. Then the three reluctantly turned to go, and Martin muttered to himself, "'Twere worth a mutiny, to save such a man. But, 'tis like him to have his own way! He'll land on his feet—at the resurrection, if not before!"

Guilbert crossed to the pump at the corner of the courtyard. There he drank deeply, then he doused his face and hands with the cold water, and dried himself with a rough towel that hung on the wall close by.

When Guilbert raised himself to go, Heloise was half way across the yard, running to intercept him.

"Guilbert!" she called, her voice tense with conflicting emotions. "You must not go out again. Stay here with—us."

Guilbert stood a moment, looking her full in the face. Then, slowly and impressively, he spoke one word—"Duty!"

"Your friends forbid you to sacrifice yourself for a lost cause," she answered, and immediately added, with a little sob in her voice, "From the upper windows I can see that the woods are full of the Sheriff's men."

She stood at her full height, and her voice appealed to him subtly. He read the gravel at his feet. Then he answered, looking steadily into her face, "My friends are great enough, and good enough not to try to thwart me in my duty."

Heloise winced; then her face suffused with a subtle pleasure. Guilbert turned toward the wood. A company of villeins ran down the road in great disorder, and scurried to cover in the brush.

"Like sheep are they scattered," he said, simply. "And they have no shepherd. I must shepherd them." Deep emotion rendered his voice solemn, and tears stood in Heloise's eyes. Guilbert took Heloise's hand, and raised it reverently to his lips. "Farewell, lady," he said. "I will return, when I have done my best for these poor fellows who trusted in me."

He turned upon his heel, and strode across the drawbridge into the road that led to the forest. Heloise turned toward the house, a strange light in her eyes. "There is a man!" she said to herself as she went indoors. She passed directly into the hall to help the household care for Abbot Thomas.

Half way to the Abbey, Guilbert found the road blocked with a confused mass of villeins. They proved to be Martin Reeve's nondescript veterans, and when they recognized Guilbert the crowd opened to receive him, and raised a mighty cheer.

"Lead us!" they cried. "Lead us against the Sheriff! We'll wipe him out!" Cries of "Crecy!" and "Poitiers!" echoed through the woods.

For a moment Guilbert was almost ready to respond to the challenge. What might not be possible, even yet, with such a body of resolute men! But, presently his better judgment prevailed.

"Nay! Nay, men! Nay!" he cried, as he mounted a fallen tree. "'Tis no use. The day is lost. Our men are scattered, and we have no support. Should we win here, we would lose everywhere else. Where the leaders are, the Devil only knows! To fight now were but to make a useless sacrifice of life. Therefore, disperse—every one of you! Melt away into the woods. Let not two of you be seen together. Go! As fast, and as far, and in as many directions as you can!"

Obedient to an imperious outward motion of Guilbert's arms, the men scattered into the thick underbrush, and shortly they were lost to sight.

At that very instant, from opposite directions, two bodies of horse thundered down the road, and before Guilbert realized the situation, he was surrounded and was a prisoner.

"I shall need your sword, Guilbert de Rouen," said the captain of the troop, spurring to where Guilbert stood.

"De Courcey!" exclaimed Guilbert. "I could yield to no better man!" but he bit his lip until the blood showed red, as he unhooked his sword from his belt, and handed it to De Courcey.

"Scour the woods!" the captain commanded his troop. "'Tis not so dusk but that you may gather in some of these rascals." He turned in his saddle, and continued to those close about him, "Half-a-dozen of you follow me, to escort the prisoner to the Abbey."

Presently, De Courcey and his prisoner appeared on the garth at the Abbey, where the Sheriff, having just arrived, stood talking with Dean Fletcher, amid the debris of the fight.

"Now! By the Holy Mother of God, what have we here—a prisoner?" shouted the Sheriff. A moment later he continued: "Let that man go, De Courcey! He's no villein, but a good loyal gentleman, as I myself can testify. It's russet, man, we are after, not linen and silk. Know better than to arrest Guilbert De Rouen. Let go I say!"

His captors obeyed, and for a moment Guilbert stood a pace or two apart, his eye ranging between De Courcey and the smiling Dean who stood close by the Sheriff.

"But we found him consorting with Russet, and directing the escape of the worst of them," protested De Courcey stoutly.

The newly lighted torches illuminated the face of a very well satisfied Dean! He smiled, and his tongue shot forth to moisten his lips. He could not forbear rubbing his hands together, so accommodating were the fates! There was a vicious gleam in his eye, but his voice was even and natural, as he spoke.

"That man, Sir Sheriff, is not loyal! I fear me he's a traitor to his class," he said.

The Sheriff looked incredulous, and the Dean continued, "Oh! You don't know! But I do! All day long have I seen him leading the villeins against the Abbey. But for him they would

have been as flies against our walls. Why, see you! On his face are marks of blood. Also his hands are smeared with blood. Let that man go, Sir Sheriff, and there will be trouble! An I mistake not, the king would pay a good round price for his head after today! Put him in the Abbey dungeon for safe keep, and I will shortly provide you with evidence of his guilt."

The Dean's voice rose as he talked, and grew tense with bitter feeling. When he finished, the note and attitude of command were so positive that De Courcey forgot that the Sheriff was in command, and acted on the Dean's order. He motioned to his men, who again laid hold upon Guilbert, and, following Brother Geoffrey, who at the opportune moment had appeared upon the scene, they led their prisoner to the Abbey dungeon.

As the heavy bossed door of the dungeon closed upon Guilbert, St. John surreptitiously thrust a candle into his hand. When the door was shut and locked, Guilbert struck a light, using the Palmer's tinder-box. The candle revealed four smooth, bare, stone walls. A small, heavily barred, splay window, high in the wall, showed that the walls were full six feet thick. A solid stone bench, built into one side of the cell, was meant to serve the purpose of a bed, as was indicated by the fact that a thin pallet and a coverlet were folded on it ready to be spread for use. A wooden stool and a small rough table were all the furniture the cell contained. The floor of the cell was one huge

slab, solid as the earth itself. The heavy door opened outward, without knob, handle or lock on the inside to encourage the faintest hope that it might be forced.

Guilbert fully appreciated the gravity of the situation. With folded arms he paced back and forth in his cell, first one diagonal, then the other, striding many aimless, useless miles, without the sense of weariness. The ultimate outcome of the revolt that had failed was not difficult to see. With a shudder Guilbert recalled the orgy of blood that had followed the failure of the Jacquerie rising in France, and he knew that he and his friends could expect nothing less ferocious in England. The retribution of king and nobles would be prompt and ruthless. Death, as well as utter defeat, stared Guilbert squarely in the face. But the strong stay not hopeless long. In a little while Guilbert ceased his nervous walk, and seated himself on the edge of the bed, a plain inventory of the elements of the situation occupying his mind.

Foremost, and first to be reckoned with, was Dean Fletcher. The crafty Dean, Guilbert knew, was his real jailor. But for him Guilbert's friendship with the Sheriff and his standing in the country would probably be sufficient to prevent serious charges from being pressed against him. A score of times that night did Guilbert regret the sudden tide of temper in which he had struck down the Dean in the forest.

Amid his cogitations Guilbert suddenly sprang

to his feet, and a little cry of delight escaped his lips. Surely here was a move that would checkmate the Dean! In the outside world Guilbert alone knew of the Dean's criminal part in the tragedy of Abbot Thomas. The Dean would suspend hostilities at once were he aware of Guilbert's knowledge! At the prospect the walls of the cell grew less thick, and the heavy door seemed ready to swing open.

Guilbert fell to planning ways to use this powerful lever. A dozen clever lines of action relative to the Dean passed in review, candidates for adoption. But for one reason or another, Guilbert passed them by. Upon closer examination it did not seem so easy to checkmate the resourceful Dean. Dean Fletcher had the next move, following any move Guilbert might make! All the resources open to the unscrupulous were at his command, and he would be certain to use them! The stooping figure of Dean Fletcher loomed up ever more formidable in Guilbert's mind, and forced him to greater caution. In Guilbert's clairvoyant vision of him; the sinister expression on the Dean's face; the compression of his thin lips; his serpent-like tongue, that moistened lips which dried spontaneously by reason of the fever of evil nature; the fell determination of the man, the more devilish because successfully cloaked in the garb of religion,—these aspects of the man dominated the situation, and Guilbert felt himself helpless in the Dean's masterful hands. It would

not do to corner such a man—he knew the art of immuration too well! If the Dean knew that Guilbert had knowledge of the part he had taken in the disappearance of the Abbot,—well, these walls were thick, and it would be easy to brick up the archway beyond the locked door! Perhaps already the door was bricked up! Horror! The Lincoln assize and the hangman's cord were preferable to that! Beads of sweat stood out on Guilbert's brow.

Moreover, other considerations arose. The problem was very difficult. Guilbert's knowledge of the secret could hardly be used without dragging the name of Heloise further through the mire of public scandal. Guilbert disbelieved the waggings of the public tongue, and did not doubt the innocency both of the Abbot and of Heloise, but he was well aware of the ease with which appearances may be made to accuse the best and holiest characters. Moreover the Dean was in a position to create whatever evidence might be needed to discredit Abbot Thomas, or Heloise, or indeed, Guilbert himself. Then again, the Abbot might die. If so, Guilbert's chief witness would be gone! Indeed it was not at all likely that the Abbot would recover. Possibly, nay, very probably, he was dead already! In the intricate maze which circumstances had set for his feet, it behooved Guilbert to exercise great caution.

It was Guilbert's great love for Heloise that finally determined him against the use of that line

of defense. Never had she seemed to him so great, or so good, or so altogether worthy, as now that the door was shut between him and her—perhaps forever. In his mind he raised her hand to his lips and kissed it reverently! He would not be guilty of breathing one draught of free air at any expense whatever unto her. If the Abbot survived, Guilbert would leave him to deal with the Dean as he pleased—and Guilbert fell to wondering whether the Abbot would be as careful as he to shield Heloise from public scandal.

Furthermore, it became more plain, as Guilbert weighed all the circumstances, that a defense which simply counter-charged the Dean with crime would not clear Guilbert of another and a different crime. Witnesses a-plenty would be forthcoming to prove that Guilbert was a prime leader in the attack upon the Abbey, whatever had been the Dean's relationships to the Abbot, or whatever became either of the Dean or of the Abbot. In the end Guilbert resolved to face Dean Fletcher in silence, to stand trial as best he might, trusting to good fortune, and to the powerful influence of a wide circle of friends, to mitigate the sentence or secure acquittal.

Faint signs of the midsummer dawn were invading the cell when Guilbert fell asleep aslant the cot. In a fitful dream, Heloise was nursing him from a perilous sickness, and the Abbot was far away beyond Cathay, when the grating of bolts in the door awoke Guilbert. He was wide awake

instantly, every sense preternaturally alert, sitting bolt upright on the cot, and watching the door slowly open. He sprang to his feet, and had shaken the crumples of sleep from tunic and brain alike, before his visitor appeared in the doorway. He was standing in the center of the cell, ceremoniously, as one would receive a guest, when Dean Fletcher stepped over the threshold.

But Dean Fletcher was in no humor for ceremony. Guilbert did not know it, but he had come thus early straight from the burial of the russet dead who in the Abbey fight had worn Lincoln green. He himself had read the office for the dead at the grave, and had left out not a syllable, but had performed every jot and tittle of the rite, exactly as though he were burying the most faithful children of the church! Such an unusual and early ritual seemed to have put the Dean out of sorts, and to have added to the heavy score he had to settle with Guilbert de Rouen.

"How came you by that candle?" the Dean broke in upon Guilbert's polite reception, as his eyes fell upon the half-burnt dip in the stand upon the table.

Possibly it was the mean sneer in the Dean's voice, or it may have been the result of Guilbert's knowledge of the Dean's hypocrisy, or it may even have been a direct inspiration from the eternal fitness of things, that led Guilbert to answer, oracularly: "God sent it to me, to break prison shadows!"

The reply startled the Dean. God was not exactly in his thoughts just then, and the oracular answer seemed so like a formal appeal to the Almighty. An involuntary shudder passed down the Dean's spine! But he was himself in a moment, and in light banter he queried: "Since when, O Guilbert mine, were rebels and the Almighty such close allies? He does not seem to have helped you much yesterday! The gibbet's full of carrion by now! I'm thinking you'll need less ghostly help before long!"

"And is it the Dean of a religious House who takes pains to wake me so early to decry the help of God? Truly, Dean Fletcher, you should take your religion more seriously."

The Dean bit his lip, and was silent a few moments. It certainly were well to be wary of such an alert antagonist. When he was ready the Dean parried.

"Truly, Guilbert," said he. "But for these inconsiderate walls, we might have you forth a veritable Wyclifite preacher! But, soft! You will need certain of the offices of the church—especially her burial service! They say 'tis very comforting as you mount the scaffold. 'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,' is great comfort when the noose is itching about your neck! You will not need the marriage office! I may read the office for the dead for you myself. I rather think I will!"

The tone of the Dean's voice was even, and his banter was laden with subtle venom. Guilbert

was silent, restraining himself, remembering the fatal cost of a loose rein. His silence was his first victory. By reason of it the Dean must needs continue the conversation.

"Remember you, Guilbert de Rouen, how once you struck an unarmed monk?" he said.

"Unarmed!" interjected Guilbert. "The hilt of your poniard clearly showed as you fell over backward! Nevertheless, against chivalry was that sudden blow, Dean Fletcher. Though I run grave danger of being misunderstood, I do sincerely apologize for that unchivalrous blow. But most certainly you were armed—though why a monk should carry arms under his habit is clear beyond me."

The Dean winced under the home thrust, and his hand slid stealthily to his hip. Again Guilbert saw the shape of a poniard beneath the Austin habit.

The Dean continued: "That day I promised you that I would follow you with vengeance. No thought had I that your folly would so soon play into my hands. I expected that revenge would be slow, that only after long years of watching and waiting could I taste its sweets. But I was willing to wait! I was more than willing, in order that the debt might pile up high! But Dame Fortune has been kind to me! You have played your foolish little game, like a cocksure school boy, and have lost it, as all men of standing knew you would. Behold now, how simple Justice becomes my avenger, closes the door of my dungeon upon you, and makes

me the chief witness of your high treason! I'll testify! Yes, I'll testify! The hangman's cord and the gibbet lie not far beyond that door. You'll swing, Guilbert de Rouen, just as surely as you struck me with your fist out yonder in the forest."

The Dean's manner was harsher even than his words. In the interest of the present, by all means Guilbert ought to have suppressed the words that sprung to his lips. But the spirit of the rapier is part of the spirit of man, and Guilbert flashed back: "I am not as much afraid of death as you ought to be, Dean Fletcher!" Then, happily, Guilbert caught himself, but not before the thrust was well home.

The Dean's face went ashy white. He glanced furtively about the cell, and his tongue flashed nervously athwart his lips. But it was only for a moment, then the Dean burst into an unquiet laugh, and on the tide of it answered whimsically, "I who die in my bed have a better chance than you who die on the gallows and with your boots on!"

Guilbert paused a while, described a circle on the pavement with the point of his toe, and within the circle traced the figure of a Greek cross. Then he answered, going straight to the point like an arrow that cleaves the mark, "Father Dauphè used to tell us lads at Rouen, 'Be sure your sin will find you out.' I know, Dean Fletcher, how hollow is the mask you wear, and I lose my guess if such hypocrisy does not, in the end, more than find you out. I leave you in the hands of a just God."

Strange as it may appear, Guilbert's rebuke gave the Dean real comfort. It was so general in its statement and appeal, that the Dean at once jumped to the conclusion that Guilbert knew nothing of the details of his wrong-doing, and that, therefore, from him he had nothing to fear. Turning to go he remarked, "I thought it fair to warn you, Guilbert de Rouen, that you could expect from me nothing but the fulfillment of vengeance. You do not cross me for naught!"

"When the time comes, with what composure I can muster, Death and I will meet," answered Guilbert: "But remember this, Dean Fletcher, that in the end both of us will stand before the bar of a just Judge, where wrongs will be righted, and the whole truth about us both will be blazed forth by the herald of unerring Justice. Both of us bide our time."

"In the meanwhile, you'll hang," hissed the Dean. Then he passed out, and behind him the bolts grated back into their place.

On the next day De Courcey escorted Guilbert de Rouen to the Castle at Lincoln, then to await the approaching assize.

CHAPTER XXII. CALLED BACK

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CALLED BACK

WHICH RECORDS THE STEADY FLOW OF AN INCOMING TIDE, AND TELLS HOW A MAID BOUND HIS ARMOR ON HER KNIGHT AND SENT HIM FORTH UPON AN UNUSUAL QUEST

At the Manor House Abbot Thomas lay betwixt life and death. Prudence determined that the Wellham family should keep secret the Abbot's presence in the house. In these hurly-burly times serious consequences might follow the bruit of his presence there. Circumstances rendered secrecy easy. The men who bore the Abbot into the Manor House were sworn to secrecy. Aside from Guilbert de Rouen, none but Martin Reeve knew whence the Abbot had been rescued; and, fortunately, that grim warrior's mouth was close as a tomb. Heloise could only conjecture how her tutor had fallen into such a plight. On the day of the revolt the Wellham villeins were with their fellows at the Abbey, and in the house fear had scattered the domestics, so that the advent of the Abbot was unnoted, and the strange story of his immuration was unknown, as Dean Fletcher had craftily calculated would be the case.

The third day the Abbot had been under her care, Heloise was in despair. Her patient had not

rallied; indeed he grew weaker, and she feared that the end could not be far away. Toward sunset Heloise wandered down the pathway outside the moat, to drink in the fresh, sweet air. A turn in the path brought her suddenly upon the Keelby witch. The witch was seated on a boulder by the road, her elbows resting on her knees, her chin cupped in the palms of her hands. Her hat had fallen to the ground, and it lay battered between her feet. She appeared to be melancholy and lost in deep meditation. Something in the woman's face touched Heloise's heart, she seemed so forlorn, so disappointed, so forsaken.

Heloise approached the witch. "Keelby Becky, are you tired?" she queried, sympathetically.

The kindly inquiry surprised the witch. But instantly force of habit dropped her mask, and her real sentiments took swift cover. She sprang to her feet and asked quickly, "How is the sick man at the Manor House!"

It was Heloise's turn to be surprised, and her surprise was genuine, and complete.

Noting Heloise's evident surprise, the witch hastened to explain. "By the wee folk of the woods, Missey, do wise women know! Tell me, now, how is your Abbot?"

A sense of being trapped by the supernatural overawed Heloise, and she answered, curtly, desperately, "Come and see." This was undoubtedly the very word the witch wanted her to say, for she complied with alacrity.

The sick room wrought a miracle upon Keelby Becky. Her hands became deft, as soft as thought, and her harsh voice rippled musical as the laughter of childhood. The herbal lore of centuries ran down into her busy fingers. Heloise became a willing slave, glad to obey the beck and nod of the woman who knew exactly what to do and how to do it.

The witch bathed the Abbot with cold water. Dexterously she chafed his body with her hands, till friction brought a healthy glow to the skin. From the folds of her dress she procured various dried herbs. With flint and steel she started a fire on the hearth, and shortly the fragrance of various decoctions simmering on the embers pervaded the room with an appetizing odor. When the liquids were ready the woman decanted them into sundry vials procured for her by Heloise. Then she administered to the Abbot a draught from one of the vials. Presently, the sick man broke out into a copious sweat. Whereupon the witch laughed, bathed him again, and again chafed his skin to rubiness. So through the long night did the witch nurse and doctor the Abbot. In the morning her patient opened his eyes, smiled a wan smile, then again relapsed into unconsciousness.

When the witch arose to go, Heloise accompanied her to the door, for she greatly admired the witch's clever leechcraft, and the instincts common to womanhood had drawn the two women strangely together.

"Keelby Becky," said Heloise, "you are a good woman. I give you my hand in friendship." The witch was visibly affected. In a voice mellow with human sympathy Heloise added, "Who are you; and why live you as you do?"

Tears stood in Becky's eyes. She sank into a settee, and Heloise seated herself by her side. "I wish I were a good woman—as good as you are," Becky said.

"Tell me about yourself," Heloise suggested.

The two were silent a moment, and the strange woman's deep breathing might have passed for sighing. "'Tis too long a story," she said at length, and her voice had the tone of one who is exchanging confidences. "A daughter of Jacob am I, and my magic is the ancient Hebrew Kabala. My father is gathered to his fathers. My mother, who taught me the mysteries of the Kabala, is a witch, and she lives by the bull-ring in Lincoln town. Dean Fletcher is my brother—"

"A Jew! The Dean—a Jew!" Heloise exclaimed, greatly excited.

"No! A renegade Jew," the witch corrected, her voice tense with feeling. "He denied the faith of his fathers that he might avoid the persecution which is the lot of our race, and at the same time stuff his purse with gold. He is hungrier for lucre than any money lender of the Ghetto! He was a bad Jew, and he is a worse Christian. He did not practise the religion of our fathers, and he is as unfaithful to your Cross as he was to our Jerusalem."

Heloise was deeply moved. Now that the witch had spoken, she could clearly recognize the family likeness between the Dean and the witch, that neither the Austin habit nor the witch's queer garb could destroy, and many of the Dean's personal idiosyncracies were both illuminated and interpreted by his sister's revelation.

Presently the witch continued, and Heloise hung breathlessly upon every word. "Brother Dick's plotting is at the bottom of your Abbot's sickness —how, or how much, the crystal fails to tell. Dick's Kabala is stronger than mine! I have sought to thwart him, but he is a favorite with the planets. Ever has it been so! Like a green bay-tree he flourishes, and in everything he wins his wicked way!"

The woman was disconsolate, and Heloise put a sympathetic arm about her waist. It was the first time in many years that the witch had felt a good woman's sympathy, and the luxury of the new experience opened in her the fountains of the great deep.

"Yet is he my own flesh and blood," she continued. "I must stand between him and his own folly. I may not denounce him, but must defend him as I can. I am torn between the pull of mine own flesh and my desire, just for once, to do the right thing.

"Dick and I are fated to be on opposite sides. I favored Abbot Thomas, and wrought for him what I could; he fought him, and I fear, would have

taken his life. He is mightily hungry for your land; I read the crystal for you, and the acres shall continue yours! I helped the rising that has failed—failed, O, so miserably; he must needs fight it tooth and nail. Because kings and nobles flay us Jews and empty our purses into their public and private coffers, I favor villeins and the coming Brotherhood, and I read in the signs that the poor shall surely win; Dick hobnobs with tyrants, and would bow the knee in Haman's court if he gained a copper by the obeisance! Yet is he mine own flesh, and I cannot expose his foul play as I would. I can only work my magic to cross his purpose, and set the gnomes to help his foes. Suppose you, that, when the Brotherhood comes to power,—as one day it must, in spite of the sickening defeat which makes our gibbets stink afresh—suppose you that the Brotherhood will give the Jew a chance?"

Her voice was solicitous with the passionate yearning of a down-trodden race, and her habitual mask had dropped completely from her character, revealing a woman of strong mind and exalted purpose. Heloise felt, somehow, as they wept together, that this queer woman was her sister. But the mutual sympathy lasted only a moment or two. Suddenly the witch pushed Heloise aside, and sat bolt upright in the corner of the settee. She arose quickly, and a musical though scoffing laugh rippled across her lips.

"Beautiful confessor!" she said, sincere, however, in the compliment. She bowed toward Heloise,

who, too, had arisen. "And a most noble and edifying confession!" she added ironically, as she crossed her arms whimsically upon her bosom. "Good bye, Mistress Heloise! Nurse the Abbot back to life; then marry him, if you can!"

The witch tripped lightly through the doorway. On the porch she turned.

"Mistress Heloise will not betray the witch's secret. Tell no one about my dear good brother!" she said, and she blew a light kiss from her hand as she ran down the steps and hastened across the courtyard.

It was long before the Abbot was out of danger. Henceforth the stress of the conflict was transposed from his body to his mind. At first Heloise and Martin Reeve, watching by the sick man's cot, were unnerved by the low, continuous, inarticulate moan, and they gathered that pain lay beyond the reach of speech. Later, the tongue took up the burden of the trouble that was weighing the sick man down, and the vagrant fancies of a disordered brain broke into incoherent speech. Snatches of sentences, and of situations, became recognizable in the Abbot's delirium. Primitive passion, mere brute force and hatred, seemed to be in the saddle. The watchers gathered that the Abbot was hot in the pursuit of something. The something individualized into a person, then became a man, and the man passed unmistakably into a monk. The watchers shuddered as they realized that Dean Fletcher was the burden of the Abbot's mania.

Heloise was horrified at this glimpse into the menagerie of dark, untutored, primeval, human passion. It hardly seemed possible that, even in delirium, naked hatred could drive poisoned vengeance so persistently and ruthlessly to the mark.

Old Martin would soothe his mistress with the cautious words, "My! My! Ain't he out of his head! He's too kind and good to say such dreadful things when he's himself." But inwardly, with an exquisite satisfaction that all but bubbled into an open chuckle, the quaint old sinner would say to himself, "By sonties, the wicked Dean will catch it when the Abbot gets well; and may I be there to see an' share the fun!"

In the meanwhile the watchers administered the witch's remedies, and day by day the Abbot won his way back to life. Gradually he gained strength, and his normal will slipped back to the helm, until one sunny afternoon the sick man relaxed into a gentle childlike slumber. Thence his progress was more rapid, and two or three weeks later Heloise was happy to know that the Abbot was convalescent.

"Martin!" called the Abbot, in the early days of his convalescence. That worthy was sitting in the shade of an evergreen in the garden stripping feathers for arrows.

"Sit by me, Martin," said the Abbot, in a tone that drew a quizzical look from Martin. After tucking the Abbot's wraps about him, Martin seated himself on the settee by his side.

"Who found me, Martin?"

The question hit the center of the bull's eye, and Martin hesitated.

"You need not fear. I'm strong enough to know. Moreover, I must know. Tell me, Martin, who found me?"

"I did, Sire and—and—and—"

"Guilbert de Rouen?"

"Yes, Sire."

"I thought as much."

"How many know where, and how you found me?"

"None but Guilbert de Rouen and myself, and I am sworn to keep it secret,—curse this tattling old tongue of mine!" The Abbot laughed heartily and put up his hand, deprecatingly.

"Tell me all about it, and tell no one else, my son, not—even Mistress Heloise."

Martin Reeve told the Abbot the story of the rising that had failed, and of how Guilbert de Rouen had led him through the veritable underworld to the Abbot's chamber, and how the twain had carried the Abbot out into the open, and how thence he had been borne to the shelter of the Manor House.

Abbot Thomas was deeply impressed. Awhile he could not command his voice. At length he said, very quietly, laying his hand on Martin's head, "You are a good man, Martin, and a brave; and Guilbert de Rouen is a prince among men. Keep secret what you have told me, and good reward shall come of it." Then to himself, he mused,

"'Tis passing strange, but it lay dimly in my mind that Guilbert de Rouen had borne me out. He is a true man—and he loves Heloise—"

Down the garden path Heloise appeared, swinging her hat by its strings, and trilling a summer song. "'Tis time for sick folk to be indoors!" Heloise cried as she approached, and straightway Martin and she assisted the Abbot into the house.

One day Heloise and the Abbot sunned themselves in the garden. The old familiar ring had come into the Abbot's voice, and the ripple of laughter—sometimes a man's laughter, sometimes a woman's, quite often the two laughters mingled together—brought a smile to old Martin's face as he pottered about in the garden. The two fell into serious talk.

"Dean Fletcher immured you?" Heloise asked, with resentment strong in her voice.

The Abbot looked at her, almost sorrowfully. "It hardly matters, does it, since I am here?" he asked. But Heloise missed the meaning that was in his voice.

"I know it was the Dean—the crafty, spiteful, wicked man—and I hate him," she answered passionately.

"Nay, now! Nay!" he answered gently. "What gain we by staining our souls with maledictions? Hatred is poison to him who hates, and it injures not the hated. 'Tis better to forgive."

Heloise looked at him incredulously. She could hardly believe her ears.

"I have had my battle, and have won, and I will

harbor hatred no longer," the Abbot continued. "One day in my tomb, a broad ray of light from the splay fell full upon the crucifix that stood upon the credence. Never saw I such a light. It seemed to be within me as much as it was without, and it suffused the Crucified with a glory that turned the symbol ruby and transparent. In that holy light I saw what the cross really means. 'Tis not an ornament to be worn, nor a symbol to be adored. It is given us whereby we may crucify the things in us that are unworthy. By that miracle of light I saw how mean and pitiable was Dean Fletcher's nature. I was sorry for him, and I forgave him. Then there stole into my heart a marvelous peace, and I felt that I was ready for the death that stared me in the face. The vision was worth the hell through which I had passed to reach its holy joy.

"Since my resurrection I have striven to hold the ground I won when the holy light shone upon me. I am stronger now, and God gives me the good world again. I go out into the sunshine once more, and I will not weight myself with hatred of the man who did me grievous wrong. I tell you, Heloise, hatred is like the fox the Spartan boy concealed in his bosom, which scratched out the boy's vitals the while he declared that the fox was not in his possession. I will not carry tooth and claw beneath my heart."

Heloise was awed at this revelation of a great soul. She had come to the Abbot with the set determination to start a train of action that would

lead to the Dean's exposure and speedy punishment. She could not at once give up her purpose.

"But, Abbot Thomas," she persisted, "we certainly must hand over Dean Fletcher to the civil law."

The Abbot looked at her a moment, a slight twinkle in his eye, then he said, "What is the use? The man is his own punishment! We would not stand in his shoes for the world. I tell you, the Almighty has him in hand! He will not escape. The just God will hold the balance even."

"But how about Justice and Right, here and now, on this earth?" she persisted.

"More justice and less wrong will follow letting him alone, than would follow our pursuit of him to the bottom of the Pit itself," the Abbot rejoined. "If we follow him, we can but stain our own souls."

"But ecclesiastically?" she urged.

Abbot Thomas smiled. "There is no help there," he urged. "Besides, it would only needlessly drag your name into the scandal. The Thornton Brotherhood would remain on the Dean's side. In the end Dean Fletcher would be commended by the Bishop for his prompt and vigorous maintenance of discipline under trying circumstances. Well do I know the monks and their habits of thought. Wyclif points the only way out. Only by a thorough reform in the practise of religion can justice and mercy be saved to the church."

Heloise was still militant. "Yes, I suppose," she urged. "But, ought we not to play off the Dean

against Guilbert de Rouen! Guilbert will hang, unless something be done. Surely you will punish the Dean to save Guilbert from mortal jeopardy?"

The Abbot mused awhile, drawing geometrical figures in the gravel with the point of his cane.

"Pray tell me, O mistress of logic, how punishing Dean Fletcher would make Guilbert de Rouen less guilty of treason! It really seems to me that the very fact of his rescuing me the day of the revolt, would be conclusive proof that he took part in the assault on the Abbey! The way out lies not in that direction. The Dean's defense would help to seal Guilbert's doom. We would do better to leave the Dean alone."

Silence fell awhile. Then the Abbot spoke again, gravely weighing his words.

"Perhaps I can help Guilbert. He is a man among ten thousand, and I would lay down my life to save him. I hope to soon be able to travel. I shall go straightway to Wyclif, and through him I hope to move the king in favor of Guilbert de Rouen. No stone will I leave unturned."

Heloise would return to the subject of the punishment of the Dean. Surely he ought to be punished. She could not understand why both Guilbert de Rouen and Abbot Thomas, each in his own way, should hold in leash the tugging hounds of justice,—not guessing that high chivalry towards the woman they both loved was the chief reason for the strange restraint.

"Promise me this," she said, "that if earthly

justice ever takes the Dean's trail, you will do naught to throw the hounds off scent, and will not yourself call them off, even though they fang the Dean's leathery throat."

Seeing how earnest she was, and how her heart was set on justice, he answered solemnly, "I promise, Heloise. I will not move against him, neither will I interfere if justice corners him."

"I thank you, Abbot Thomas," said Heloise. "May justice not delay its coming! And you will leave the Dean to his ill-gotten nest! Ah me! I fear me that you will never be yourself again, and that the good old times are gone forever." As she spoke she looked away from him, as though her wistful eyes would pierce the future.

"Yes," he answered gravely. "I must away. What can be done for Guilbert must be done at once,—before he comes to trial, if it be possible. I must forth to Wyclif to do what I can. My vows are more sacred to me than ever before, and they shall be fulfilled in Wyclif's camp."

A great tenderness passed into the Abbot's voice, and Heloise shrank within herself, as though she were afraid of what the future might bring forth. But outwardly she appeared cheerful. The wind was chill, and she tucked the Abbot's wraps about him. He caught her hand at work among the rugs, and drew her close to him on the settee, but his tenderness brought her only discomfort.

"I have had a great light, too, upon our relationship," the Abbot said, with something of a tremor

in his voice. "My new light proves to be but your old light, that you had by intuition from the first. Well nigh did I lose my way, but from the first you saw clearly. My love almost shipwrecked me, body and soul."

The Abbot's voice choked. Heloise's face crimsoned, and her eyes rested uneasily upon the ground. She did not speak; she could not speak, and presently the Abbot continued.

"Love, the greatest experience in life, is only possible when it can combine with honor and integrity," he said. "I could not love you truly and — I will love you no other way—and be unfaithful to my religious vows. My vows are on me, and I can never love you as a man loves the maid he weds." His voice grew sad, in spite of his effort to maintain a brave front. "But I shall love you more highly, more purely, and without fleshly passion—as a faithful priest may love a pure woman. At last, Heloise, I have scaled your high level, and I am standing by you on the spot to which you sprang at once when first we discovered that our souls were knit together. It has taken me long to climb, and the way has been hard; you soared naturally, on easy wings! We must both go our ways. You will be free to love as women love who wed, and so will you fulfill your destiny; I shall wed Wyclif's Cause, and live the life I first vowed to the Church."

They were brave, fateful words, and neither the Abbot himself nor Heloise, fully knew how hard

they were to speak, for the man devoutly loved the maid, and his words belied his heart. When at length Heloise broke the silence, a choking catch in her voice told the price of her masterly self-control.

"It is my own thought that you speak—my own vision come true," she said, quietly. "I trow that it will be hard for us both to carry out your wise words." She could say no more, and she settled down in the corner of the settee in misery. It was not the shrewd north wind that chilled her to the marrow.

After a painful silence, the Abbot spoke her name. "Heloise," and it was almost as though he addressed a stranger.

"Yes," she answered, timidly, and as though she were far away.

"Guilbert de Rouen loves you better, and other than I can. I love him, too—how greatly no man can tell. I could do my duty better, if I knew that you would give your soul and body to his keep."

Heloise shivered. Her world seemed chill and dun, and her friends far away. "Speak not of it," she said wearily as she arose. "The wind is cold, and we must indoors."

The Abbot arose, and stood before her, looking into her eyes. He put his hands gently upon her shoulders, and drew her tenderly to him. "A farewell kiss," he said, in a tone sacramental.

"Henceforth, I shall be but your priest—your spiritual guide—and to me you will be the loveliest soul in all my flock."

In silence they passed into the Manor House.

CHAPTER XXIII.
THE LINCOLN ASSIZE

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WHICH DULY RECORDS THE TRIAL OF GUILBERT DE ROUEN AT THE BLOODY ASSIZE, AND SETS FORTH THAT GOOD MAN'S NOBLE BEARING IN THE PROSPECT OF A TERRIBLE DEATH

More than four months had passed, and Guilbert de Rouen lay in Lincoln castle, awaiting the approaching grand assize. Every item of news from the outside world which the Sheriff had brought to him, rendered Guilbert's prospect more hopeless. Item by item, Guilbert had learned the sad story of how the revolt had everywhere failed. The gathering of a hundred thousand peasants on Blackheath, and the preaching of John Ball; the march of Russet on London, and the miracle by which the gates had been opened, and the peasants had gained bloodless entry into the city; Mayor Walworth's bold murder of Wat Tyler under a flag of truce, and the king's promise to redress the people's wrongs; the few days of gracious pardon, when it seemed as though the millennium had really come, and as though the Brotherhood would surely be established; the awful days that shortly followed, when King Richard forgot his word, and peasant blood ran freely as water; then the

king's sending of Judge Tressilian on the trail of the revolt, and the awful progress of his Bloody Assize, striking terror through the land; which was followed by the strange news of gibbets overcrowded with the dead bodies of villeins, until crows sickened of human carrion, and the air was tainted to the detriment of the public health—all this strange news the Sheriff broke to Guilbert as gently as he could.

The Sheriff's friendliness secured for Guilbert the privilege of occasional clandestine visits from his friends. Twice Sir William and Heloise came to see him. The first time—soon after Guilbert's incarceration—Sir William was full of hope, for his power in court would undoubtedly obtain Guilbert's speedy release. When next he came, in spite of an effort to show a brave face, he could not wholly hide his fears. The king was so enraged against the leaders of the revolt that nothing but blood could appease him and his nobles, and though Sir William had redoubled his efforts, he had little hope of success.

Heloise brought with her a touch of the genial outside world, and the ripple of her voice was music in Guilbert's ear. "Abbot Thomas and John Wyclif are our chief hope," she said. "Wyclif is still a power at court, and where my father fails Wyclif may succeed. Day and night they work in your behalf, and I have great hope that they will succeed."

Guilbert shook his head, whereat Heloise re-

sponded, "Your name is 'Doubting Thomas!'" Then both laughed, though not very heartily.

Never had Guilbert loved Heloise more than now, but he spoke not a word nor gave he a sign of what surged in his heart. "The gibbet stops my tongue before it stills my heart," he thought, as he stoically committed himself to silence.

Sir William and the Sheriff talked over the approaching trial, and as for the space of half an hour Guilbert and Heloise were left alone, Heloise broached the subject that lay most heavily upon her mind. "Dean Fletcher will be the chief witness against you," she said. "Let us make a counter attack, and charge him in open court with the Abbot's immuration. It would discredit him so much that you might escape."

Guilbert shook his head, "Nay! Nay!" he said. "That could do no good, and out of it would come a great deal of harm. It could not free me, and it would certainly involve you." He paused, reluctant to proceed, and then added: "Dean Fletcher immured the Abbot—because of his—his fancied relations with—with you, Heloise. To attack him now would be to air the Thornton scandal. I will not drag your name into court. You and I, and Martin Reeve, are all who know aught of that secret. I have reason to believe that the Thornton canons know no more about it than does the outside world. If I gain my liberty we will devise some plan whereby Dean Fletcher may get his just deserts. For the present we must let

him alone. Promise me this, Heloise—it may be my last request—promise me that you will in no wise raise this question at the trial."

Heloise's face crimsoned, and she was silent. It seemed very strange to her that Guilbert and the Abbot should both take exactly the same view of the matter. They had it in their power to crush the Dean, but they deliberately chose to suffer and let him go scot free.

Then a great light broke in upon her. Both these men spared the Dean because they loved her! At the cost of their lives they would shield the woman they loved! To be loved so nobly, and by two such men! And to know that she could be the wife of neither, though, in a way, she dearly loved them both! With the vision came a vivid sense of her own unworthiness. Her spirit rebelled against the sacrifice Guilbert and Abbot Thomas would make in her behalf. But Guilbert's eyes rested upon her, and the spell of his will moved her.

"Against my will, and against my better judgment," she said at length, with downcast eyes, "I will respect your wish, seeing that the Abbot desires the same thing. I would slay the wicked man with my own hand were that possible. But I promise you that I will not bring his wickedness into court. Afterward, things may be different."

After court had adjourned, the day before the trial, the Sheriff sat with Guilbert in his cell.

"Tomorrow," said the Sheriff, reluctantly.

Guilbert looked up at him quickly. "I'm glad,"

he said. "Any action is better than suspense. What was the grist today?"

"A fine October day it has been, and the sun sets in acres of crimson," the Sheriff answered, looking up through the barred window.

Guilbert smiled faintly at the evasion. "Nay! Tell me Tressilian's grist today. How many?"

"Let us not talk about it. I'm sick of blood. The city apprentices attacked the Ghetto today, and made a fine riot. I had two hundred men-at-arms out to quiet the roysterers."

"Nay! Nay! Tell me, if you be my friend. I am no child. Fortitude comes only of knowledge. How many did Tressilian condemn today?"

"Twenty-one!"

"Eighteen yesterday?"

The Sheriff nodded.

"Twenty the day before that! 'Tis a mighty grist! How many russets lie in your hopper ready for the mill?"

"Two hundred and twenty-three, at last count; and they have a most evil smell!"

"The grist will last awhile longer! How many have you gibbeted?"

"More than two hundred!"

"'Hanged, drawn, and quartered,' is the sentence?"

"Yes. The judge has it by heart. He knows no other sentence!"

"Was Tressilian drunk today?"

"Aye! He was! And he swore like a trooper,

but not so bad as yesterday, when a villein quipped him, and he swore till he was purple in the face."

"Let me take a bow and an arrow—just one arrow—into court tomorrow," said Guilbert, playfully. "I'll quiver the arrow in the bully's heart, and rid the world of a fiend incarnate!"

The Sheriff laughed. Clapping his hand on his knee, he exclaimed, "By sonties! Would that I dare to do it, for you are a true shot!"

"I'm the only gentleman on the docket?"

"Yes; the rest are russet nobodies, and he drives them to the gibbet like sheep to the shambles," answered the Sheriff.

"I shall not disgrace my ancestry tomorrow," said Guilbert, solemnly, casting his eyes upward. "Often have I looked on death before. 'Twill be like meeting an old acquaintance. How long between the sentence and its execution?"

The Sheriff hesitated, and looked out of the window. "The same day, at sunset," he answered, with a catch in his voice.

On the morrow, with four men-at-arms, the Sheriff came to convey Guilbert to the court room. Guilbert was ready. The footfall of the six men reverberated in the subterranean corridor down which the little procession passed toward the court room.

Approaching a flight of wooden stairs Guilbert first heard the confused hum of voices in the room above. As he followed the Sheriff up the steps, Guilbert caught sight of the court room crowded

to suffocation with men and women stretching their necks to get the first glimpse of the prisoner.

"There he is! There he is!" the multitude cried, as Guilbert stepped into the room, and a bailiff hammered on a desk, shouting "Order! Order!"

The shuffling of many feet and the swaying of the excited crowd, first thrilled Guilbert and then sickened him, and the fetid atmosphere struck a chill to his heart.

"Poor stuff for revolt!" he thought, as he looked over the swaying, reeking, evil-smelling mass that packed the court room.

Within the area reserved for officers of the court every seat was occupied, and begowned men-of-law leaned on the balustrade that separated the bar from the space below. Beyond the balustrade even the standing-room was all occupied. There stood city merchants in gay attire, doctors of physic with the wise look. Franklins, reeves and plowmen were crowded in from the country, and monks and friars were so compactly jostled together that their interminable debate and quarrel was for the time being impossible. Knights, squires and yeomen, in their vari-colored garments brightened the room like blossoms upon an autumn bank of russet—for, Guilbert noted, the russet courtepy of the villeins was in evidence everywhere. Indeed, the majority in the court room were evidently villeins. Hot tears rolled down their grimy faces, and their eyes bulged with horror at the fate which they too well knew awaited the distinguished prisoner.

These details, though they were foreign to the center of his interest, attracted Guilbert's attention before he saw Judge Tressilian seated on a dais a short distance in front of him. The judge's scarlet fur-lined robe first caught Guilbert's eye. From the scarlet robe Guilbert's vision wandered to the judge's face—a hard, flinty face, stained with passion—and Guilbert felt instinctively that the man was incapacitated by anger. It seemed as though the judge were there chiefly bent upon avenging the murder of his predecessor by the villeins of Kent. Near the judge's dais Guilbert saw Sir William Wellham wedged in the throng. Close by him, and near the table, sat Scrivener Twidale, busy with his quill, and from between the stalwart forms of two men-at-arms near by peeped the queer face of Dwarf Henry. Soon Guilbert lost something of his sense of loneliness, for it was good to feel that these friends were in court.

From the dock Guilbert swept such a bow to the judge as he might have made had the judge and he met at Westminster. The judge acknowledged the bow with the slightest inclination of his head, and then turned abruptly sidewise and stared out of an open casement. Presently the judge turned and looked the prisoner full in the face, but spoke not a word. At this place, all through the trials, the judge had broken into invective and coarse tirade against the plain russet prisoners. Today the judge did not rant—whereat the multitude marveled.

What new spirit had come upon Judge Tressilian?

Had he foresworn profanity? However that might be, he seemed uneasy. He turned again to the open casement as though the vista afforded him some relief, and while he ruminated upon the cluster of dirty chimney pots and a small area of tiled roofs which was visible through the casement, he simulated reflection by nibbling the end of his quill. It would seem that it was one thing to condemn a few score of russet nobodies with scant trial—their execution being a foregone conclusion—and an entirely different matter when a strong man of family, with friends influential in high circles, stood in the dock awaiting trial. The multitude breathed hard and waited, and the judge's quiet added a new dramatic element to the scene.

"You wish a jury?" queried the judge, turning to Scrivener Twidale, who had risen by the table, and stood facing the bench.

"We do, my lord," answered counsel.

"Draw the jury," answered the judge, but so quietly that the people did not realize that the wheels of justice were again in motion.

It took but an hour to impanel the jury. During the process Sir William Wellham stepped up to the dock, and engaged in conversation with Guilbert. Awhile, the judge scowled and fidgeted in his chair, and at length he broke out sharply, "It is not permitted to speak to the prisoner."

"I did but counsel him on his defense," answered Sir William, surprised and chagrined at the unreasonable prohibition.

"In these treason cases, that is not permitted," answered the judge, with asperity, and Sir William prudently resumed his seat.

"Richard Fletcher," called the attorney for the crown, and deputies echoed the call down the corridors. They need not have been so vociferous! The Dean of Thornton was waiting to be called. He would not have missed prompt answer to his name for anything in the world! The first deputy had hardly got the name upon his tongue when Guilbert saw the door open, and the spare figure of Dean Fletcher, shrouded from crown to sole in the somber habit of the Austin Canons, stepped into the room and walked to the witness stand, stirring a wave of excitement as he passed.

Under examination the witness stated that he knew the prisoner well. Witness had been present during the attack on Thornton Abbey. In fact, he had managed the defense that day. Yes, it might truthfully be said that he had led the defense —by the aid of the Blessed Saints. There was fighting from early morning till nightfall. Yes, much fighting. During the day he had seen the prisoner continually. The prisoner was leading the villeins—was, indeed, in command. No! indeed; there could be no mistake! He knew the prisoner better than he knew his own father—because he had associated with him more recently. Yes, the prisoner had built the new church at the Abbey. That work had thrown the prisoner and witness closely together. While the church was

a-building he had enjoyed daily intercourse with the prisoner. Therefore he knew him well.

Witness had seen the prisoner at various points during the attack on the Abbey. He was always directing the rebels against the Abbey. Yes, he carried a sword. It was drawn, and he had noticed blood upon it. He heard the prisoner give many orders, and had seen him leading the villeins in various attacks. There could be no doubt that the prisoner was the leading spirit of the attack upon the Abbey. Yes, he was fully aware that his testimony might lead to the hanging of a gentleman. This the witness greatly regretted, since the gentleman was an old friend, but his conscience and his oath compelled him to speak the truth, even though he himself were to suffer thereby.

Guilbert sat unmoved while the Dean swore away his life, except that his manacled hands twitched nervously on his knees. He pierced the Dean with his eye, but the Dean was looking at the jurors while he detailed his testimony. Never once did he look towards the dock.

"Dean Fletcher, you defended the Abbey on the day in question?" Scrivener Twidale asked, in cross examination.

"We did," came the precise answer. The Dean was not to be caught napping!

"Who did?" queried Scrivener, snappily.

"The Brotherhood of St. Mary's at Thornton," answered the Dean, seeming to enjoy the verbal dress parade. But behind the impenetrable mask

which the Dean wore, Guilbert detected a certain uneasiness. Whither tended these questions? Did this fine lawyer know more than was public?

"Had you no assistance?" drawled Scrivener, his shaggy head cocked sidewise, his eyes examining the panelwork of the ceiling.

Without, Dean Fletcher was composure itself; within, the lawyer's simple question stirred a commotion. However, he looked squarely at his interrogator. Just what the Dean read in the lawyer's face will never be known, but it may be surmised that the astute man concluded that the question was innocent of all knowledge of the green archers, and the part they had borne in the defense of the Abbey. He answered deliberately, "No, sir, the monks and I together, fought till the Sheriff arrived with troops."

"That will do, Dean Fletcher," said the man-at-law.

As the Dean stepped off the stand, the tense strain under which the auditors had rested during his examination broke out into a lively buzz of excitement. "He'll hang! He'll hang! O, sure he'll hang!" passed in hoarse whispers from mouth to mouth.

It took much vigorous hammering of the gavel on hard oak to reduce the excited multitude to quiet. Guilbert heaved a sigh of relief when the door closed upon the dark figure of the Dean. Then again he fixed his attention on the proceedings.

"Robert Croix. Call Robert Croix."

The new witness on the stand, the prosecution proceeded.

"What is your occupation?"

"I am an agent of the King."

"Were you in Thornton shortly before the attack upon the Abbey?"

"I was."

"Have you ever seen the prisoner before?"

"I have."

"Where?"

"At Thornton, in Lincolnshire."

"State the circumstances."

"I was detailed to shadow the movements of the agitators in Lincoln. I gained admission to a secret council in the stables of the Saracen's Head at Thornton. I passed as a Clerk of Oxenford, Thirwood by name, and had the countersign."

There ensued a great commotion among the villeins in the room. "Order! Order!" cried the deputies, and men-at-arms pounded the butts of their spears on the floor to enforce quiet. Guilbert recognized the man. "The wretched spy," he said bitterly under his breath, as he composed himself again to listen.

"You may continue, Croix. Take no notice of these louts," exclaimed the judge. "Another demonstration—and I will clear the court, and hang a dozen villeins!"

"During the meeting," the spy continued, "I heard the prisoner pledge himself to the revolt in conversation with one John Barr, a well-known

agitator. I heard the conversation plainly. I was nearer to the twain than I am to you," referring to the counsel for the prosecution.

Vigorous cross-examination failed to shake the testimony of the witness. That he was a professional spy counted for nothing. Anything was welcome that promised to strengthen the throne, or that would bring about the punishment of those who had participated in the revolt.

For the defense little could be done. Sir William testified to the prisoner's good standing, as did several others, but little impression did the testimony make.

The crown attorney did not care to address the jury! The facts in the case were so acknowledged that he would not waste the time of the court. A verdict against the prisoner,—well, the facts in the case left no other course open!

Nothing was left to Scrivener Twidale but to make a strong plea for mercy. The prisoner was an architect, and not a warrior. His reputation was of the best, his character above reproach. Probably it was sheer love of adventure that had inveighed him into the revolt. With so much that was adventuresome transpiring about him, the prisoner had simply drifted in, because peril was fascinating, without in any sense adopting the cause as his own. He had no treasonable intent, and had meant no harm. Out of sheer love of adventure he would have joined the king in a struggle against the villeins as quickly as he had the revolt.

The speech was a brilliant bit of special pleading. Both the lawyer and the man had done their best, but Scrivener sat down feeling that his effort was a failure. The men-at-law lightly beat a tattoo on the tables with their fingers, or stared vacantly at the ceiling. The judge turned to his casement landscape, and bit his lip hard, evidently to suppress an outburst of bad temper. Beyond the bar the crowd craned its neck the better to see first the prisoner, then the judge, and, anon, the jury, then it held its breath. Rain beating on the casements, and the sough of the wind among the turrets of the castle, sounded ominous. The people shuddered. Guilbert de Rouen sat upright, pale but composed, apparently more at ease than many in the room. He watched closely the movements of the judge.

At length, after fumbling over some parchments on his desk, the judge turned to the jury. "Gentlemen of the jury," he said, in a sub-tone meant only for the jury's ear, "the case is simple—very simple. Indeed, there is no defense. The facts as charged are acknowledged. A jury may not yield to mere sympathy. It is for you to find a verdict according to the facts. You may retire to consider your verdict, if you choose. But, it is more than probable that you will wish to save time and dispense with that formality." Then, raising his voice to a more public pitch, he continued, "Gentlemen, are you ready with your verdict?"

The members of the jury bent their heads together

in hurried whispered consultation. It took but a moment to reach a verdict. Then the foreman arose, "My lord," said he, "we find the prisoner guilty as charged."

It took the men-at-arms full five minutes to restore quiet in the room. When the hot wave of emotion had subsided the judge said to the jury, "Put it down in writing—a clerk will scribe for you!"

The judge handed to the foreman a document already written in full, needing only the signature of the foreman of the jury, which that good man speedily scrawled on the parchment.

When the signed verdict was in the judge's hand he turned to the prisoner. "Have you aught to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon you?" said he, reaching, even as he spoke, towards the black cap which lay on the desk before him.

Guilbert de Rouen arose, and answered quietly, "No, my lord; except to say that the acts which bring me here were done in behalf of the poor villeins of Eng—"

"Tut, tut, Guilbert de Rouen," broke in the judge sharply. "We want no defense now, nor excuse, nor extenuation." The judge was adjusting the black cap upon his head, when Sir William Wellham arose and addressed him.

"My lord, I suppose my action is unusual," he said. "My excuse is that this is an unusual case. I am known to the king, and I plead for clemency for Guilbert de Rouen. He is well known to me, and however dark appearances may be against

him, I know that he is guiltless of treason. He is no criminal. If it were possible I would appeal for the ordeal of mortal combat, and so refute these false accusations, but then I suppose 'benefit of clergy' would prove a safe refuge, for his chief accusers seem to be monks! My lord, if you cannot acquit or pardon the prisoner, I pray you to give me leave and time, to appeal to the king. I pray you to withhold execution till I can see the king."

Sir William seated himself. Guilbert fixed his eyes on the flinty face of the judge. The multitude held its breath and watched intently to see what would happen, for Sir William's appeal had made a profound impression.

"I may take no notice of your appeal, Sir Knight," said the judge, after a full minute of silence. "'Tis kindly meant, but out of place. Regardless of sentiment, the law must take its course. Full justice must I pass upon the prisoner."

Judge Tressilian put the black cap upon his head, and the multitude held its breath. He motioned to the prisoner, and Guilbert arose, standing with head erect.

"Guilbert de Rouen," said the judge, in an even tone of voice, "in open court you have been convicted of treason, insurrection, and murder. You have made no defense. The facts of the case are undisputed. As an example to the class to which you belong by birth and education, you must suffer the extreme penalty of the law."

One could hear the people breathe. They leaned forward, feverish to catch every word. Guilbert stood at attention, erect as a soldier.

"The sentence that I pass upon you is,—that you do hang by the neck till you are dead. And I do further direct that your body shall be drawn and quartered, and afterward gibbeted."

Guilbert de Rouen stood apparently unmoved by the shocking words. When, after a long pause the judge added, "And may God Almighty have mercy on your soul," Guilbert bowed his head, as though he acquiesced in that part of the sentence. The multitude was moved to sobs and tears. Dean Fletcher, standing by the door, turned to Guilbert a smiling and well satisfied face.

Judge Tressilian called the Sheriff to the Bench.

"Mr. Sheriff, you may delay execution four weeks," he said in tones inaudible beyond the narrow circle about him. To Sir William, who had joined the group, he added, "That will give you time to see the king. The king's at Westminster. But I know your mission will be in vain!"

Promptly the men-at-arms closed up about Guilbert, and the Sheriff stepped into the dock saying, "Come! I have four weeks' respite."

Guilbert looked at the Sheriff inquiringly, but received no further word, so he turned to follow his guides down the wooden steps. As Guilbert stood facing the weeping multitude, a commotion at the back of the room attracted his attention.

From the midst of a band of villeins an unearthly yell rent the air. In an instant the crowd surged in intense excitement, and pandemonium broke loose. Above the hubbub, like a sort of obligato solo, holding its own among all the other sounds, could be heard a shrill treble voice, pitched high, carrying detached words and broken parts of sentences.

"To hell with judge and jury! Insurrection—rich—poor—villeins—Rouen—Holy Moses—Sacred Mother of God—gibbet—night—damnation of your souls," were all the words Guilbert could distinguish. What the speech might mean he could not tell. Presently the queer figure of a woman individualized itself in the throng, standing high above the rest. For a moment she stood there, her feet, perhaps, resting upon men's shoulders. She was a most absurd figure, appareled in a fashion a hundred years out of style, and made more conspicuous by a high conical yellow hat, cocked a little to one side of her head.

But a moment did she stand there, her arms gesticulating wildly, her tongue uttering scorching words. Then she vanished through an open casement.

"The Keelby witch!" Guilbert said to himself as he followed his guards down the stairs.

An hour later there were hundreds in Lincoln city who, with their own eyes, had seen the Keelby witch ride off from the court room, high in the air, astride a living broomstick!

CHAPTER XXIV.
THE MOTHER OF A WITCH

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THE MOTHER OF A WITCH

WHICH MAKES DUE RECORD OF CERTAIN STRANGE HAPPENINGS ON THE BORDERLAND OF THE OCCULT WORLD, AND LEAVES THE READER TO INFER THAT WITCHES LOVE MUCH THE SAME AS DO LESS SUPERNATURAL FOLK

Immediately after her escapade in the court room, the Keelby witch might have been seen to alight from the casement upon the flat of a roof, and to scurry to the friendly shelter of a stack of chimneys. Only a moment or two did the chimneys hide her movements, but when she reappeared her yellow cap had vanished, and some touch of magic had so changed her garb that it was a demure nun, in regulation wimple and gown, that walked briskly across the roof to the part of the battlements farthest from the public eye. Out of keeping with her new role though the movement undoubtedly was, the nun swung herself lightly over the battlement, and, with the aid of the ivy which grew thickly on the wall, she reached the ground behind a flying buttress, whence she glided into the protection of the crowd that crossed the castle yard as the court room emptied after the trial.

It was raining hard, and the crowd, homeward bound, drifted across the yard, discussing the

events of the trial, wondering what the unusual disturbance might mean, and grumbling at the steady downpour. Secure from observation in the crowd, the nun passed through the outer gate, crossed the drawbridge into the city, and at the Bail she turned to the right down the narrow crooked street. When she came to the dip of Steep Hill, she turned sharply downward, hugging the walls for shelter from the rain and also for protection from the torrent that surged down the steep gutters.

Close by the Dernestal gate, which had not yet been closed for the night, she halted before the door of a house. Doubtless the pelting rain made the woman a little impatient, and possibly she was anxious to lose no time in placing the door between herself and chance passers-by. However that may be, she seized the grotesque dragon which hung upon the oaken door to serve the purpose of a knocker, and with it she vigorously delivered sundry cabalistic signals; whereupon, apparently of its own accord, the door opened before her, and she quickly passed out of sight. Halfway down the narrow passage between the two houses, the wall to the left was broken by a doorway wherein stood the withered figure of a strange old woman, who was evidently waiting for the nun. Her appearance was uninviting, but her greeting was sprightly and hearty.

"Well, a-well! Your knocking would waken Tophet! By the fathers of Israel, what monkey

prank be you at now, saucy Becky?" exclaimed the beldame, as she motioned her visitor to follow her indoors. The nun, evidently well pleased with her reception, followed, laughing softly, for she appeared to appreciate the greeting as a compliment of worth.

"The devil is to pay at the castle," answered the nun, as she crossed the threshold. "I read the Fool on the Bench a red hot bit of my mind! For once he heard the truth from the villeins' side! I'm sheer angry at such make-believe justice!" As she spoke, she shook the wet from her garments and wiped her muddy feet on the mat inside the door.

"Come, dry yourself by the fire, Becky," the old woman said, shaking with laughter which she tried to conceal, as she led the nun into the house. When they were in the room and the door was shut, the old woman added, with a shake of her head that indicated strong disapproval: "You had better let alone our crooked, foolish, stolid English justice, my dear, or there'll be a witch swinging by the neck, or drowning on a stool, I'm a-thinking!"

"Tut! Tut! Tut! mother mine, you grow timid with your years. Since Dame Balaset was hanged from this house, near a hundred years have passed, but I declare that you are scared yet! The devil take 'em all, I say, for the innocent blood that they have spilt! But we are in no danger, mother mine. While they persecute the villeins, they will let Jews alone."

With her back to the fire the nun warmed herself and the flickering light from the grate danced her shadow grotesquely on the walls of the room.

"It all looks familiar," she thought, as her eyes ranged the properties of her mother's craft.

A stuffed owl stared wisdom at her from a table by the wall, and a living hawk blinked its eyes from the top of a dusty spinning wheel which stood in a corner of the room. "We'll go a-hawking yet, you and I, old bird," she said, laughingly, as she stroked the bird's feathers.

From a bracket on the wall a human skull looked down on her, and some weird touches of phosphorus, left over, perhaps, from last night's seance, shimmered on the dry bones uncannily. "Old Grimface!" she exclaimed, as she took the skull in her hands. "You make me laugh! I wonder who you were! Now you are a witch's slave!"

Her eye rested on an old punch bowl of beaten brass, old enough to have served wassail at a viking's feast. "Gentiles have ever been fools with wine," she mused, and with her finger she traced a pentagram in the dust that gathered in the bottom of the bowl.

A baby crocodile crouched on a ledge on the wall, and yawned for flies that came in plenty and went their way unharmed. The nun raised her eyes to a shelf on which stood sundry bottles pasted with labels, and containing various medicinal infusions. "Hippocrates' and Galen's lore," she mused, and looked upon the vials with pride. "But, there is more to be learned yet," she added aloud.

"You had better doff your gown," said the old woman, who had just returned to the room.

While she spoke there was a flutter among the folds of the nun's kirtle, followed by a few quick movements of the nun's hands, all noiseless as the turning of an owl's head, and the dark robe lay at her feet. The wimple about the nun's head flew into a far corner of the room; and, dressed in a close-fitting and short green silken skirt, with a jaunty cap to match, the erstwhile nun swung into a merry impromptu dance, marking the time by clapping her hands above her head—a witch once more, albeit bubbling over with the gay spirit of the Maypole, though the month was October.

"You're a clever one, Becky! You're a witch of witches, and I love you for it, daughter!" and the elder woman threw her skinny arms about the neck of the younger, and smacked her lips with a hearty kiss, which marks of endearment Becky returned with interest.

"You taught me, mother mine," the younger witch replied, as she stroked back the grey hair from her mother's forehead. "By your Kabala I thrive, and 'tis my mother's daughter that I am!"

"But you must be careful, Becky; you wild graceless scamp! If the lawyers once get you, or the churchmen, or the mad populace, you'll last about as long as does a rat with a terrier; and then my poor old lonely heart would surely break."

The older woman sank into a chair by the hearth and lapsed into moody silence. Becky drew up a

stool and sat by her side, and both women stared into the fire, as though they would read the runes of the fitful embers. A sense of something impending, on which they would rather think than talk, seemed to oppress both women. At length the elder witch drew a deep sigh. "Any news of Richard?" she asked, in a voice pitiful with hopelessness.

"He's in town!" Becky answered, laconically, her eyes still searching the embers.

The old woman started. "He will not come here?" she asked, in a manner which indicated that she half feared and half hoped that Richard might appear.

Becky shook her head. "You will never see him here!" she said, emphatically, interested still in the embers.

"What's he doing, now?" the old woman asked, moved with maternal solicitude.

"Getting rich, and sleeking his own hide!" answered Becky, bitterly, as with the poker she pushed the end of a log off the andiron into the fire. After an awkward pause, Becky continued, "He'll be Abbot soon!"

"Abbot! Abbot!" the old woman repeated, slowly, as though she felt for the meaning of words with which she was unfamiliar. "That's like being High Priest in Israel in the olden day?"

Becky nodded her head, and a faint smile momentarily lighted her face. She was more familiar with the ways of the Gentile world than was her aged mother.

"I would he were a Rabbi—just a plain Rabbi," she continued. "In his veins is the blood of Israel's best—and he serves at Christian altars! O, God of our fathers!" she cried piteously as she clasped her hands, and her uplifted eyes brimmed with tears and prayer. "Can he be a good man, Becky, and be renegade to the faith? We practise the Black Art, Becky—that I know! But ever have we been high-minded, and we have kept from the meannesses that make life wicked. Our Black Art is but a higher knowledge which one day all mankind will be wise enough to share. Despicable Christian though he be, is our Richard a true man? Tell me that, Becky. I could half forgive him his Christianity were he a true man."

Becky's face clouded, and she hesitated. "A little pinch of the righteousness which our fathers loved, and a mite of goodness which Christians affect, would do our Richard no harm!" she answered, unconsciously drifting into the oracular style of her profession.

"Then Richard Balaset is a wicked man?"

"Nay! mother, nay! You know he does not bear your name! He is named, Fletcher; Dean Fletcher that was, Abbot Fletcher that's soon to be!" There was the tang of high scorn in Becky's voice.

"Tell me of him, Becky. Tell me clearer than the crystal reads. Speak me words of open vision."

"No! Richard is hardly good! He is crooked in his heart, and is given to wearing many faces—

which might serve a timely turn in our Black Art, but which they tell me ill comports with the character of Dean or Abbot! By sharp practise, if by nothing worse, he comes to the Abbacy, and today he needlessly swore away the life of as good a man as ever lived. Richard's shoes are getting dangerous! Were they my size, I would not wear them a single minute! The lightning might strike me dead!"

"Woe is me! Woe is me!" the old woman wailed, as she rocked herself back and forth in her chair. "His danger is his punishment for forswearing the faith of his fathers. They stand in slippery places who forsake their fathers' God. But, have you warned him? Have you warned him, Becky? He is our own flesh and blood!"

"Often, and well! But, 'tis no use! My readings always come askew in his case! His Kabala overbears mine; perhaps because the Saints help him, and contend against me—who knows? I would have diverted him from conflict with Abbot Thomas, but his ambition vaulted over my caution, and now the Abbot's gone, and it appears that Richard will have his place! When he quarreled with Guilbert de Rouen, I sought to win him to better mind. But the architect was the Abbot's friend, so Richard plunged into hatred of them both, and he thinks thereby to win profit. Many weeks did I urge him that his interests lay with the villeins, but forsooth, because the nobles have the fattest purse he must side with them, and since the revolt failed he is firmer in the saddle than ever!

All one night I read the crystal to him against his coveting of the Manor House lands, but he'll sell his soul and mortgage his body for a rod of forest glebe, and he expects soon to own the land! He overrides my wisdom. Yet, notwithstanding his apparent success, Richard is very foolish! His ambition harms so many folk that it needs no second sight to see that shortly his enemies will unite to crush him. Then will he have no friends! Already the crystal reads me strange forebodings when I call his name."

While Becky spoke, her mother was evidently the storm center of strong conflicting emotions. There contended in her bosom natural affection for her clever son, and strenuous resentment of his perversion from the ancestral faith. She suffered vicarious remorse for his apostacy, but could not wholly hide from herself her mother's pride in his advancement in the church that gloried in Israel's downfall. She frankly loathed what her son was and did, while her daily prayer bore up a petition for his protection from the consequent harm. As a penalty for his faithlessness, she banished him from her presence, the while she filled her mind with pleasant imaginings concerning him. And while she vigorously wished that, for his sins, he might come to Tophet, she hoped somehow to see him enjoy Abraham's paradise, and her withered old arms ached to clasp him to her bosom once more before she died.

"Is there no hope that his heart may turn?" the old woman asked, at length.

"None, whatever," Becky answered, promptly, though it was evident that, in her way, she too was torn by the conflict which so discomforted her mother. "There's more to Richard's horoscope than I have been able to read, mother," Becky added, after a pause. "The edge of the crystal always dulls, so that I cannot read all his doings, nor forecast all his future."

"The bottom of the Pit would be better!" the old woman muttered, and then a long silence fell upon them both.

Suddenly, Becky changed her mood, and became the happy, careless, jaunty witch again, evidently intent upon lifting Mother Balaset out of melancholy. But the task was hopeless. As Becky waxed more and more sprightly, Mother Balaset sank into corresponding depression of spirit. Huddled into a heap in her chair and staring abstractedly into the flickering fire, the old woman at length drifted into a sort of trance, and Becky sobered down to watch what would come of it.

Presently the old witch arose, and glided through the heavy curtains into the further apartment. A minute later she emerged, bearing a brass kettle and a small sheaf of dried herbs. She set the kettle on the fire, and, squatting low on the hearth, began to throw herbs into the kettle, muttering unintelligible incantations the while, and keeping a slow and irregular time by the swaying of her body. When the kettle began to bubble Becky stopped her humming of a ballad of Robin Hood at the

place where Maid Marian was gay at a wedding, and settled down soberly by the old woman's side.

"What is it, mother?" she asked, blowing aside the steam and peering intently into the noisy kettle.

"A topsy-turvy world; a very topsy-turvy world!" the hag answered, swaying rhythmically and falling into a low, soft croon.

"Tell me, mother; tell me."

"War! War! War!" came the answer, in a wild wail. "The king's a fool—a fool for greater fools! Killing folk to make them good! Think of that! Bury your money deep, my men, and forget where you dug its grave! Daughters, keep indoors! You're safer! Beware of Death, for the white horseman rides afield."

The hag swayed her body to and fro, and crooned the crisp sibylline sentences in a tone and rhythm of occult quality. She seemed to be detached from what she was saying, and the burden of her utterance appeared to be new even unto herself. The word "Death," as it drifted from her lips, seemed to startle and even horrify her. Her body stiffened and she gazed into the kettle with a far-away sight that was positively uncanny. Becky, thinking the trance was over, tried to pull the old woman away, but without effect, for her eyes still remained fixed among the mysteries of the bubbling kettle.

Becky arose and snuffed the candles, and presently the strange spirit moved the woman again. "The clouds are about him," she moaned. "The

heavens are curtained with blackness, and lightening zigzags the sky! He is struck! He is down! He is dead!"

Becky tried to comfort the old woman, but she pushed her daughter from her impatiently. Then, in the light of the fire, the old witch commenced to scrutinize her own palm. "'Tis the age-long conflict betwixt Mars and Venus," she said slowly and in tones almost inaudible, as she read the difficult lines. "Jupiter stands cold and impartial between. God of Israel! What is this? Both Venus and Mars are down! No man can stand against such a portend! Dicky! O Dicky! Dicky, my son!"

The old woman sobbed, and the arm of the younger woman stole about her tenderly, affectionately, her gaiety all gone now. Presently, the hag's gaze returned to the bubbling kettle. She looked more intently, straining her eyes as though to ken some far-off event. In a moment she caught her breath in short quick gasps, and clutched her bony hand to her throat.

"Daughters, too! Daughters, as well as sons!" she broke out again. Beware! Beware, Becky! You're in the line of danger! Gallows do I see, and chains! A warning! A clear warning! Take heed, my daughter! Take heed!"

The vision had spent itself, and seemed to have well-nigh broken its medium. When the old witch came back to consciousness she did not seem to remember what had transpired. But the melan-

choly foreboding remained, and all the ingenuity of Becky's art failed to drive it away.

Early on the next morning the Keelby witch returned home. The old Jewess climbed Steep Hill with her. Well beyond the Roman Gate the women bade each other good-speed, and kissed farewell.

"Now, have a care, Becky, you scamp! Do lie low!" admonished the older woman. "Remember that the fox that hunts only o' dark nights lasts the longest, and has the most to eat. An you will, you're bigger than the fates, but you will have to rise early and sit up late to keep ahead! You must be more careful! No need to beard Tressilian in his den! The Devil will get him without your help! If you interfere the Devil may take you, too!"

"Green Devil, mother, or Black?" quirked Becky, a little more than willing to make light of her mother's forebodings.

"Green, Black or Red, matters little," retorted the old woman, a sickly smile playing among the wrinkles of her face, "if they once get the chain taut about your neck, or if they keep you under too long on the ducking-stool! Have a care, I tell you, Becky, have a care. Witches as flip as you have come to grief!"

So did the strange women part, and the Keelby witch took the Ermine Street homeward. At her heels stalked an enormous grizzly deerhound, of fearful limb and fang, alert, faithful to his mistress, and, evidently well under her masterful control.

It must also be related that the witch carried in her bosom her favorite Angora Black Cat. The portents were so thick these days, that it behooved her to keep at hand the full protection of her lore.

CHAPTER XXV. BLACK CAT

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BLACK CAT

IN WHICH THE STRANGE INCIDENTS CHRONICLED WOULD SEEM TO MAKE IT APPEAR THAT A WARNING GIVEN AND A WARNING HEEDED MAY BE TWO QUITE DIFFERENT THINGS, IN THE AFFAIRS OF WITCHES AS WELL AS OF COMMON FOLK

The day following the sentencing of Guilbert de Rouen, the Ermine Street northward from Lincoln was safe with travel. Following the Keelby witch, company after company of travelers, some on foot and others on horseback, passed under the old Roman arch, bound for the north. Knights, squires, and yeomen took the road gaily together. Franklins, reeves, millers, merchants, and plowmen, enlivened their travel with many a spicy tale. Men-at-arms trudged with forest archers in Lincoln green, and, on much improved plans, they fought again many a bloody foreign field. Monks and nuns kept company with preaching friars, and their contentions filled the woods with argument, while those among them indisposed to argue, sang many a rollicking song. Knots of dejected villeins held the road homeward, meanwhile bewailing the rising that had failed, and lamenting the certainly impending fate of Guilbert de Rouen.

In the afternoon of that day Dean Fletcher,

accompanied by Brother Geoffrey, started northward. As they passed under one of the two flanking posterns of the Roman Arch they admired the imposing span. They noted the trade marks of the craftsmen who had built the arch, the tool marks being still visible on the faces of the huge blocks of stone.

"Strong men built this," said Brother Geoffrey.

"Romans! Pagans!" answered the Dean. "It was one of the gateways of their city-camp, and they built it long before there were monks in the land!"

The two monks overtook a band of yeomen on the road, and, since it would be dark before they could reach Thornton and footpads might then be abroad, doubtless it was prudence which led the Dean to accept the yeomen's invitation to travel in their company.

The day was hallowe'en, when, from time immemorial, fairies, witches, and other occult imps of the air move topsy-turvily among the affairs of men. But peace reigned on the Ermine Street that afternoon, except where the fates would have it that a round dozen of Tyrwhit men rode close behind a troop of Rosses. There, all day the old family feud burned fiercely between the bitter partisans. Twice during the day had the quarrel abandoned words for quarter-staves and stones, which weapons had like to have been supplanted in the fight by the use of bows and arrows.

Toward evening both parties were riding hard

hoping to reach home before nightfall, when they came in sight of a bridge which spanned a sluggish stream that ran across the road. Both spurred for the empty honor of crossing the bridge first, and the Ross men won the race. Eager to exasperate the Tyrwhits, the Rosses crossed the bridge very leisurely. The temper of the waiting Tyrwhit men was not improved by the shouts of triumph, the epithets of contempt, and the rude taunts which the victors hurled backward as they crossed the bridge. These verbal missiles the Tyrwhits returned with lively interest. However, the strife between the partisans would soon come to a natural end, for at the next cross-roads the Tyrwhit men would turn eastward into a forest road to Ketilby Hall, a mile or two away, while the Rosses would ride northward several miles farther before they would turn out of the road to their homestead under the lee of the big hill.

A long while after the event, until, indeed, it became a well-established tradition, the countryside stoutly maintained that it was hallowe'en hobgoblins that slackened Tom Thor's saddle-girth so that it slipped. What else could it be? Tom kept the saddle till the troop came to the cross-roads, and a few paces beyond he dismounted. As he tightened the offending girth, a strange thing happened. A great, hairy black cat, with big, lustrous eyes, sprang fearlessly out of the woods, and, with a couple of graceful lopes, alighted at the trooper's feet, where, with arched back and curved

tail, he rubbed affectionately against Tom's legs, after the time-honored manner of cats. All the Ross men saw the evil omen, and held their breath. Tom swore a great round oath, and would have kicked the cat away, but that he knew that dire ill luck would follow.

The Tyrwhit men, riding up at that instant, found in the situation a golden opportunity for a final fling.

"Ho! Ho! Black Cat, there!" cried a Tyrwhit wag. "Hallowe'en it is, and Tom's steed for his midnight ride is ready! Clap on the saddle, Tom! Ride, man! Black cats and witches' foals are proper mounts for Rossmen! May your forays be pleasant, Tom, when you ride the witch's nag on midnight raids, with the Green Devil himself for rein mate!"

Immediately the air filled with warlike taunts and threats. Every man's hand flew to his weapon, and blood would certainly have been shed had not young Ross spurred between the two troops and commanded his retainers to move forward. The Tyrwhit troop took the cross-road, jeering as they rode away, and the two factions kept up their wordy challenges until the intervening forest drowned their voices.

The Ross men pushed on, breathing their horses at a walk, and as they rode they affected to make merry of the advent of the black cat. The spell of hallowe'en being upon them, the men began to tell ghost stories in a lightsome and disbelieving

vein. The bogle that walked down the dell with its head tucked under its arm; the ghost of the old squire that sat at the end of the kitchen table every morning and laced its gaiters, before it vanished outdoors; the nightly smashing of tons of crockery in the pantry where the serving-man was found dead with his throat cut; the wraith that wailed among the white mists that rose on the moat at Newstead Abbey; and the specter knight that tilted against the full moon when the sky was cloudy—all these tales came up with various emphasis of discredit as the troop followed the homeward road. Black cat was nothing to these men, and they did not believe in ghosts! Nevertheless, each tale produced its appropriate crop of shivers, and unconsciously the troopers had made themselves ready to see things at night!

Tom Thor rode uneasily in his saddle, and the local ghost stories did not allay his apprehensions. Ben Bolt, Tom's stirrup mate, sought to stir him to a livelier mood.

"Black cat's naught," said Ben, slapping Tom on the back. "Take no notice of him!"

"Hang the black witch-cat!" exclaimed Tom, petulantly and resentfully. "Have done with the devil's tabby! Talk never mends ill."

Thus would have closed the incident but for the fact that at that very moment Black Cat again sprang out of the wood, and leaped across the road through the troop. As the fates would have it, again the creature of ill omen crossed immediately

in front of Tom Thor's horse, and then it disappeared in the brush on the opposite side of the road.

Nobody knew better than the Rossmen, how unlucky it was to meet a black cat, and well did they also know that to cross a black cat's trail, especially before the scent was cold, would precipitate worlds of evil upon the person unfortunate enough to take the fateful step. The troop halted in the road as though it were confronted by a stone wall.

"Tom rides with the witches tonight!" whispered the men one to another under their breath, as cold shivers ran down their backs.

Tom sat uneasily in his saddle while his horse pranced about uncannily, and he swore roundly to keep up his spirits. But swearing did not appreciably help matters. The evil omen of Black Cat's trail, all the more potent because the day was hallowe'en, still lay across the road, and the devil would certainly be to pay.

Young Ross came to the rescue. "Father heard in France," said he, "that a decoction made from the tail and heart of a black witch-cat is proof against half the diseases that carry folk off. French witches carry a phial of it tied about their necks."

The old chroniclers uniformly aver that the suggestion was certainly of the devil, and that the troopers were being supernaturally lured to their doom, for, at that very moment Black Cat came purring out of the wood, and made straight for

Tom Thor. Tom turned white as a ghost. But, quick to act on the suggestion of young Ross, the troopers were out of their saddles in a trice, raining stones upon the innocent cause of the offense.

Then, high above the hubbub, clear and shrill, shouted a woman's voice from the thick of the forest. "Beauty! O Beauty! Beauty, come here!"

Black Cat fled from the stones toward the voice, but the stones fell so thick and fast that he was driven up a tree. As the cat clambered up the hole, a stone struck him full and hard. The cat uttered a shrill weird cry that seemed to the superstitious men to be like unto the shriek of a man being wrenched on the rack.

The troopers had good reason to remember the voice of Black Cat, for it was the signal for another and an awful sound that immediately filled the woods, and that struck terror to the hearts of them all—the deep, full bay of a huge hound full cry and close upon his quarry. There was a sound of leaping and plunging through the under brush, and then out into the open leaped the Keelby witch's terrible deerhound. In two gigantic bounds the hound was among the dismounted troopers, and before they realized the horror of it, the ferocious beast had Tom Thor by the throat, and was shaking him as a terrier shakes a rat.

"Shoot the brute! Shoot him, men!" cried young Ross, as he mounted his horse by way of discretion.

The savage brute had left his victim, and was leaping for the throat of another man, when an

arrow from Ben Bolt's bow cleft his heart and he fell in a heap at the foot of the man who would next have felt his fangs.

Then all the Furies broke loose. The woman's voice, vibrant with the passion of unbridled anger, broke out again from the woods. A moment later the Keelby witch sprang into the open, and strode over to where her hound lay dead. It was not the gay lightsome creature who yesternight had danced about the hearthstone at the foot of Steep Hill who now faced the slayers of her hound, but the well-known public witch, rendered grotesque by the art of her trade, and made formidable by the suggestion of the occult everywhere about her garb and person.

"A wise woman's hot curse upon you, takers of innocent life, and cowards all," she shouted, gesticulating grotesquely, but in a manner calculated to inspire fear.

The witch knelt by the side of the prostrate hound, and laid her cheek affectionately against the dog's neck. When she arose her face and hands were smeared with blood. The life-blood of her pet set her a-fire, and she sprang to her full height. With the sinews of her bare arms taut and her fists clenched tight enough to draw blood, she looked scornfully upon the circle of men about her.

"Nice men!" she cried, with tense passion. "Soldiers brave! War against cats and dogs! Put live men in front of you, and I'll warrant you would all run! Cowards all, I say! Cowards—every mother's son of you!"

She advanced a step or two, and the men gave way before her. At that moment she might have gone free. But the passionate tide of anger surged up again within her, and, livid with rage, she turned to pour vitriolic curses upon the troopers.

"May the foul fiend plague you all the days of your life," she screamed. "May your skin crack with hellish dryness, and your flesh dry to powder on your bones. May the blasting plagues of Egypt pest you and yours forever, by night and by day. May dismal owls hoot, and hideous snakes hiss and bite, and slimy frogs croak dire disaster for you, where'er you be, and what'er you do. And may the Red Fiend harry you in life, and in death sweep you into the bottomless Pit."

The witch's storm of wrath had a mixed effect upon the men she cursed. Already the occult power was working. Their flesh began to creep. But that Tom Thor lay stretched by the dead dog, and that their fighting blood had been touched, every man of them would have fled. But some other influence was also at work this hallowe'en, and the men stood their ground. Perhaps the witch was a little surprised that they did not run, for she halted her words, and scanned the trees for Black Cat.

Presently, in a new tone of voice, soothing and inviting, she cried, "Beauty, O you, Black Beauty, come here! Wicked men shall not hurt you. Come here to your mistress, and home we will go! Come Beauty! Come!"

Out from the underbrush glided the black cat.

As the fates had doubtless fixed it, again the cat crossed through the midst of the men, who separated to let the ill-omened creature pass. The witch squatted on the ground by the side of her dead hound, and took the wounded cat upon her lap. The blood that soiled the cat's glossy coat again stirred her pity and execration. Once more her voice rang through the forest, this time sharp, insistent, penetrating, and commanding. "Satan! O, there! Satan! Here, I say, Satan! Forth, old wolf! Among them, old fellow! Tear and slay! All the fiends are in you! Out fiends, out, I say! Tear the two-legged cowards that slew Dane! Sic 'em! Sic'em! Satan, I say, sic'em!"

The vehemence of her call had raised the witch to her feet, and the black cat stood on her shoulder rubbing himself affectionately on her cheek. But it was no use. Satan was chained in the witch's house at Roxton Wood, too far away even for a witch's call. Perhaps it was as well for the Rossmen that the witch's door at Roxton Wood was bolted.

Well the troopers knew of Satan, and his very name inspired them with dread. They glanced furtively down the road, apprehensive lest the huge wolf should appear. Then, when they realized that they were free from that danger, they heaved a deep sigh of relief. But the witch stood by the dead hound, with the black cat on her shoulder as a constant menace, and Tom Thor lying prone near the body of the hound.

Ben Bolt, more fearless than the rest, advanced

toward Thor. Mistaking his movement as a menace to her hound, the witch shouted, "Touch not Dane, you lout, even with your clumsy foot! He's better dead than you are living, and, dead or alive, he's worthier of your heaven! O, invisible Satan! Leap on them! Leap on them, I say! Fang their very souls, Satan!"

Then the witch bent over the hound, put her arm under its limp neck, and implanted a kiss on the dog's shaggy hair. When she arose there were fresh smears of blood on her face, and tears might have been seen in her eyes. Then she started as if she would proceed on her journey, but, to her surprise, the troopers blocked her way.

"Stand aside, rascallions! Stand aside, or I'll smite you with the jaundice!" the witch cried, threateningly, as she advanced a step or two up the road. She remembered now Mother Balaset's warning and began to wish herself well out of the adventure.

But the Rosses' blood was up. They threw caution to the winds, and stoutly stood in the witch's way. Young Ross spurred his horse toward the witch, and the animal shied and plunged so much that its rider well-nigh lost his seat. "Curse the witch!" the youth exclaimed, as he struggled to bring his horse under control. "She'll be the undoing of us all!"

Just then a chain creaked in the thicket at the side of the road a few paces farther on, as the October wind swayed the tenant of a gibbet that stood there.

"No! *Hang* the witch, and be done with her, if we're all damned for it!" cried Ben Bolt, beside himself with rage. It was his arrow that stuck in the side of the witch's dead hound, and his saddle-fellow who lay stretched in the road. Ben's blood had reached the boiling point.

The atmosphere was electric, and Ben Bolt's hot words fell on his comrades' ears at a moment when it was easy for thought to spring to immediate fulfillment. In the twinkling of an eye the troopers closed in upon the witch. The woman fought like a lioness, her eyes blazing fire, her tongue heaping scalding imprecations on her assailants, all the while fighting valiantly with her clinched fists. But it was no use. The odds against her were too great. With a thong from a saddle the troopers bound her wrists together behind her back, and then they dragged her through the thicket to the foot of the ghastly gibbet. There they lifted the witch into Tom Thor's empty saddle. Very gingerly the troopers shook from the chain the grisly remains of the gibbet's last tenant, and it took but a moment to fasten the rusty chain around the witch's neck, whose struggling and screaming served only to spur the men to the task. Then a trooper slapped the horse on its haunches, and when the animal started up, the witch was left swinging by the neck, kicking the air wildly, and sputtering unintelligible imprecations at the jeering troopers who stood by to watch her die.

"Fetch poor Tom, and let's go," commanded

young Ross, when he was satisfied that the witch was dead.

Presently four men returned. "Tom's not dead!" they cried. "His leather stock under the collar of his jerkin is what saved him. With leech's care his neck will mend. A close call, but 'a miss is as good as a mile!'"

The witch hung still, swaying only with the evening wind, and the bones she had displaced seemed not more dead. Setting the wounded man on his own horse, with comrades riding on either side to support him, the Rossmen rode down the hill with the dead black cat safe in a saddle bag.

CHAPTER XXVI.
THE GREEN DEVIL AND THE RED

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THE GREEN DEVIL AND THE RED

WHICH RECORDS THE STORY OF A STRANGE MOONLIGHT CHASE, AND SETS FORTH THE HOPE, THAT, SINCE THE DEVILS FALL OUT, IN THE END HONEST FOLK MAY GET THEIR DUE

Early one morning, a week after the hanging of the Keelby witch, Dwarf Henry might have been seen in the woods near the Abbey clearing. The moon flooded the open space with soft light, and cast dark shadows in the thickets. In the moonlight the Dwarf presented a most grotesque appearance, for from head to foot he was habited in the flaming red of the Devil of a Miracle Play. Out of his head grew two formidable horns, and the end of the conventional tail of the stage devil was tucked way under his red belt. On his face he wore a mask with a very prominent nose, and the false face had been so smeared with phosphorus that it shimmered in a most ghostly manner among the shadows of the forest.

The Red Devil picked his way through the forest as though he were upon a mission. He walked swiftly, but he was so wood-wise that his progress was almost as noiseless as the movements of a denizen of the wild. At length he came to a slight

elevation, which was crowned with a clump of trees growing in the midst of a thicket. Among the trees, sheltered by the thicket, the Red Devil ensconced himself so that he was completely hidden from view, and so that at the same time he could command a view of the surrounding forest. In the thicket he found a stout bow and a quiver of arrows, which he appropriated as though they had been placed there for his particular use. It was very evident that Red Devil waited for something, or for somebody. So still was he that the wild things of the forest came out into the open, and, save for the distant barking of dogs and the far-away cry of a pack of wolves, primeval silence reigned in the forest.

The sharp report of a snapping twig under foot, followed immediately by the rustle of a pocket of dry leaves, brought the Red Devil to a most watchful attention. Quickly and silently his eye ranged the complete circle of his vision. Nothing was in sight, but a smothered expression of disgust, occasioned, probably, by the snapping twig, served to rivet the Red Devil's eyes upon a certain blind trail in the forest. Presently there appeared in the trail a most remarkable object, at the sight of which the Red Devil breathed deeply and clutched his bow, but made not a sound. The strange apparition hugged the shadows, and it glided from thicket to thicket so silently, that, but for the mischance of the broken twig, it might have passed for a footless shadow. Presently, the movements of

the queer being led it out into the open, and the moonlight revealed a figure which was an exact counterpart of the Red Devil, except that, from crown to toe, the newcomer was habited in green. The Green Devil was moving in the direction of the Abbey, while the Red Devil secretly watched his every movement.

The matins bell at the Abbey rang out, clear, slow, and solemn, and at the sound the Green Devil quickened his pace, whereat the Red Devil indulged in an inaudible chuckle. The Green Devil still hugged the shadows, and ever and anon he glanced backward, as though it were as important to him that retreat should not be cut off as that his advance should continue open. As he approached the edge of the wood, the timber became more sparce, and, ahead, the moonlight gleamed in the open clearing in which stood the Abbey. The Green Devil stood a moment in the thick shadow of a beech and looked about sharply, as though to assure himself that his movements were unobserved, which precaution the Red Devil seemed particularly to enjoy. At length the Green Devil made straight for a stately elm standing apart in a thicket of blackthorn. On the edge of the thicket he took a short, winding trail to the elm. When he reached the shade of the tree, the Green Devil scrutinized his entire circle of vision two or three times, and then, apparently well satisfied that there was no eye to note his movements, he proceeded leisurely to unstring his bow; which

simple action seemed to afford the Red Devil considerable satisfaction.

By this time the Red Devil had arisen to his feet, and shielded by the trunk of a tree, he watched his green double at a distance of not more than a hundred yards. It so happened that the moonlight fell full upon the tree by which the Green Devil stood, and consequently that most of the Green Devil's movements were open to the invisible watcher. The Red Devil plainly saw the Green Devil unstring his bow, and wrap the string about the weapon as he placed it in a hollow of the tree.

"You will not need it again!" the Red Devil said to himself, as he watched the Green Devil's precautions. He seemed to be greatly enjoying the moonlight pantomime which Green Devil unconsciously provided for him.

The Red Devil watched the Green Devil unbuckle his belt, and he saw him hang it with its full quiver of arrows on a peg in the hollow of the tree. Evidently the Green Devil would leave these weapons handy for another day. Then the Green Devil seated himself on a boulder at the foot of the tree, and proceeded to divest himself of his snug habit. He speedily unlaced his leggings, then unbuttoned his close-fitting vest, and loosened the green mask that hid his face.

The Red Devil watched these movements silently and with bated breath. He was so absorbed in the toilet of the Green Devil, who at that moment was struggling to extricate his limbs from their

tight casings, and had become so excited at the ludicrous situation, that inadvertently he stepped on a dry twig, and the twig snapped with a loud report. The effect on both Devils was instantaneous and marvelous. Sudden panic seized the Green Devil. He glanced up and saw the Red Devil arising out of the thicket, and the unearthly shimmer of the Red Devil's face left no doubt in the Green Devil's mind that the real Devil was upon him. Without stopping to seize a weapon, with one huge bound the Green Devil cleared the thicket, and, like a stag started by the hounds, ran straight for the clearing and the Abbey. Nor did the Red Devil hesitate. With a hideous yell that served to redouble his quarry's speed, he leaped out of the thicket and followed hot upon the Green Devil's trail.

The first few bounds of the Green Devil's flight were hampered by his attempt, either to divest himself of his green, or to readjust the half-detached garments so that he could the better run, and also so as to maintain intact his disguise. But an arrow that whizzed close by his ear, and a moment later splintered in an oak ahead of his course, had the effect of centering his attention upon the single business of running, and he left his garments to fly about in such ludicrous fashion as his greyhound-like bounds might throw them! It seemed a pity that the Green Devil's bow was safely hidden in the elm. Had it been otherwise, there might have been a pretty exhibition of archery in the woods,

with a life for a stake, and no one by to witness the fine shooting. Perhaps the Green Devil would have been too scared to shoot. But he was not too scared to run! There was the more need to run, in that the Red Devil undoubtedly gained on him. When he realized this, the Green Devil gritted his teeth, muttered a half-smothered and vitriolic curse, and by a superhuman effort further increased his speed.

Still the Red Devil gained on the Green. The Green was out in the open now, and not fifty yards behind him the Red closed in on him at every stride. Singularly enough, the Green Devil headed straight for the Gate House. But the bridge was up, and the keeper in the tower was doubtless dreaming of the catch of fish he would make on Thursday. There appeared to be no hope that the bridge would drop for either the Green Devil or the Red, and thirty feet of moat lay like a band of silver about the Abbey's grey walls. But neither the bridge that was up, nor the porter who slept, nor the moat that was deep, served to swerve or to discourage the Green Devil in his course. He kept a straight swift course for the Gate House. Once, for only a moment, it looked as though the Red Devil might halt a second to wing another arrow. But upon second thought he flung the bow far from him, and added another spurt to his record. He would not risk another shot.

Some score or more yards on this side the moat, two large beeches stood apart, straight in the line

of the Green Devil's flight. When he emerged from the shadow of the beeches the Green Devil bore in his hands a long slender leaping pole, and with it in position, an evil smile of triumph playing on his face, he ran straight at the moat, after the time-honored fashion of fen folk. It indicated an uncanny and supernatural prescience on the part of the Red Devil, in keeping with his habitation and vocation, that he swerved in his course just sufficient so as to pass beneath the other beech. There, leaning against the trunk and ready to his hands, he found another leaping pole, as like the one in Green Devil's hands as one pea is like another, and a grim smile of satisfaction and triumph played on his face beneath the red mask! If there was a leaping pole ready for one Devil, there was also one provided for the other, and as yet the race belonged to either Devil.

When the Green Devil was midair in his vault over the moat, his disordered green flippant in the morning breeze, the Red Devil was making the last half dozen short quick strides before planting his pole for the leap. The Green Devil landed squarely on the narrow strip of turf at the foot of the wall, turned the sharp angle at the corner, and held on down the south wall of the Abbey towards the old disused Gate House. The Red Devil landed but a moment later upon the selfsame spot, and, gurgling something in his throat that suggested the fury of the underworld, he followed his quarry along the foot of the wall.

When the Green Devil reached the old Gate House, a key was ready in his hand, and when the Red Devil came upon him he had the postern gate ajar and was dashing through. But the Red Devil was too quick for the Green. The Red Devil seized the Green Devil by the shoulder, and threw himself upon him like a tiger. For a full minute, Red and Green swayed and clawed and gripped together in the postern gate, half within the Abbey and half without. Neither spoke a word, but as they joined in the deadly wrestle the fierce passion of death was in the grip of them both.

Then, as it were by superhuman strength, the Green Devil threw the Red Devil from him outside the postern. But the Red clung to the garments of the Green, and the action was accompanied by a ripping, tearing sound, and when the red monster broke away, he carried in his hand the upper portion of the Green Devil's disguise. Through the open postern the moonlight shone through the ripped disguise full upon the face of a man. The fearful face was ashy pale, and hatchety, and was marked by the thin lips of a very firm, wide mouth. And where the green was torn away the moonlight clearly revealed the black habit of an Austin Canon!

Quick as lightning the postern snapped into its place, and was bolted from the inside. But the Red Devil had seen the face, and most surely he would not forget it, though on the other side the postern the Green Devil congratulated himself that he had not been recognized.

A little while the Red Devil sat upon the ground before the gate through which his strange quarry had gained ingress to the Abbey. He was very quiet, and seemed to be absorbed in thought. Perhaps, however, he was simply resting after his hard chase. Or it may be that his inaction was the result of disappointment. When he spoke, the words that dropped from his lips were strange and uncouth, passionately hot with lusty heat. They were black, foreign oaths, blood-curdling vows of vengeance, and sentiments fitter for the Pit than for the earth. They sounded like samples of liquid lava from a secret lake of human fire.

After a while the Red Devil's hot words brought him to his feet. Slowly he walked back to the spot where the two tell-tale poles lay in the moat. How to make the backward leap without the space for the necessary run, perplexed him a while. Then he saw a way. He dried his own pole by drawing it across his knee until the dry surface presented a firm grip for his hands. Then he retraced his steps back to the angle of the enclosure, which he turned, and continued on till he was half-way back to the old Gate House. Then he turned about, and on the strip of sward at the foot of the wall he made the run to the moat, planted his pole, and successfully vaulted clear of the water. Then, straightway the Red Devil disappeared in the woods.

When the Red Devil was quite certainly gone, a monk, with his hood drawn far over his head (for

the early morning air was nipping cold), stole out of the Abbey at the old postern gate. With fine caution the monk footed the narrow path by the wall to the spot where the Green Devil's pole still lay in the moat as that strange apparition had left it. The monk secured the pole, and hastened with it to the postern, through which he carried it into the enclosure, though what use a monk might have for the Green Devil's leaping pole hardly appears in the rubrics!

The Red Devil returned hastily to the hollow tree by which he had surprised the Green Devil. He tore aside the cunningly devised screen of bark, and peered into the opening.

"'Tis his arsenal!" he exclaimed. "He will need such tools no more!" he added, as he rubbed his hands together in glee.

The tree was a veritable cache. It contained cooking-utensils that would have served a small camp of followers. Three or four stout full-length bows hung in the tree close by quivers filled with arrows which were void of all marks by which their owners might have been identified. Curious knives were there in plenty, every one of them ground sharp and evidently much used. A leather bag bulged with money, and a large bunch of keys might have unlocked half the treasure houses of the country side. There hung in the hollow sundry garments of various shapes and colors, which had evidently served as Green Devil's disguises while he was on his different secret quests.

The Dwarf took off his own disguise. "I believe he thought that I was the real devil!" he said laughingly. "He'll be scared to death when once he is cornered! The blackguard has no heart!"

Then the Dwarf carefully folded the torn fragments of the Green Devil's disguise, and put the package into his bosom. He took the full purse, and also one of the bows and a couple of quivers with their arrows.

"These tell-tales will I take with me!" he said unto himself. "They will hang him! I have him. The cunning devil! But he'll hang! He'll hang just as sure as I'm a dwarf!" So speaking, the Dwarf strode toward the Manor House.

CHAPTER XXVII.
THE INSTALLATION OF AN ABBOT

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THE INSTALLATION OF AN ABBOT

IN WHICH A SLIP BETWEEN CUP AND LIP IS ATTENDED WITH ASTOUNDING RESULTS, AND OPERATES IN SUCH A MANNER AS CLEARLY TO INDICATE THAT NEMESIS HAS NOT FORGOTTEN HIS DUTY

Shortly after Dwarf Henry's nocturnal adventure it might have been imagined that something unusual was afoot within the Abbey. From morn till night the great doors remained closed, and the bridge, even during daylight, was more often up than down. Travellers who sought the wonted hospitality of the Abbey were turned away bootless at the Gate House. The few canons who walked abroad wore a preoccupied air, and barely passed even the small change of the weather with those they chanced to meet in the way.

The reason for this new temper lay in the fact that two days later than the secret advent of the Green Devil within the Abbey, the Brotherhood of Thornton had solemnly elected Dean Fletcher to the Abbot's chair. The record of the election duly showed that Abbot Thomas had resigned the office, and had unaccountably disappeared from the Abbey. In view of the approaching solemnity the Abbot-Elect had invited the Brotherhood to a

season of special fasting and prayer, and to a closer withdrawal from intercourse with the wicked world, as was befitting such an extraordinary occasion. That the tightened discipline sealed the news of the election from the outside world, and so kept the Bishop ignorant of the course of events until after Dean Fletcher should actually be seated in the Abbot's chair, need hardly be assigned a secondary place among the motives that prompted the Dean's actions in the matter.

The day before the installation, the Abbot-Elect went upon a tour of inspection through the Abbot's house in order to view his new official residence. The house had been thoroughly cleaned and repaired, under the direction of Brothers Geoffrey and Benedict, and those two members of the Thornton Brotherhood accompanied the Abbot-Elect upon his tour. The Dean was especially interested in new tapestry which covered the walls of the hall, and which entirely hid a certain section of masonry where aforetime a door had opened from the hall into Abbot Thomas's bedroom.

"I like it well," said the Dean to Geoffrey. "The design is fine, and the needlework beyond praise." He ran his eye critically over the design. "Sir Galahad, then, fails to find the Holy Grail?" he said, and an uneasy laugh lurked in the Dean's voice.

"I think the space ran out, Father Abbot," Brother Geoffrey replied. "Or surely the cup would have been stitched into Sir Galahad's hand. It

needs another panel, and you see we have all the wall covered. Perhaps we can find a place for Sir Galahad in your room."

The three drifted into the Abbot's sitting room, and the Dean carefully closed the door. An awkward silence hung among the three a moment or two, then Brother Geoffrey spoke, quietly, but uneasily. "He must have been dead a long while now," said he, as he jerked his thumb toward Father Thomas's old bedroom.

Dean Fletcher affected a jaunty air. "Aye, and his tomb's sealed tight!" he answered lightly. "There'll be no whiff of him for nose, or ear, or eye, till the crack of doom! Unless Gabriel blows his trumpet extra loud, I'm a-thinking that Abbot Thomas will be missing at the resurrection!"

"All the better for us!" exclaimed Brother Geoffrey. The Dean moistened his lips, and, rising, led the way out, where the air was fresher and where he seemed to be more at ease. As he went down the front steps he said unto himself, "I think I will not change quarters yet awhile. The Deanery will be more comfortable!"

On the following day the Matins bell awoke the Abbot-Elect from fitful slumber. Now that the goal of his ambition was so near, the man seemed to be nervous. Tramp, tramp, tramp, shuffle, shuffle, shuffle, many feet sounded across the garth as the Brotherhood threaded the cloisters toward the church. "St. John has charge till after Prime," the Dean murmured, and turned over in bed for

another sleep, for he was weary, and the day would call for strength.

Sleep proved shy under the Dean's second wooing, and when it did come it was feverish and fitful. He lay unquiet on the narrow bed. It seemed that he was a boy again. A village street straggled across a clearing in the forest. A big, shady swimming-hole came back into his dreamy consciousness. Then the last house of the village stood out by itself, lonely as though planted in a desert, and under its low thatch a mismated father and mother ruled a boisterous brood. Yet was his dream so strangely mixed that the Dean knit his brows in perplexity. A Gentile father and a Jewish mother mixed unintelligibly in the fantasies of his dream with a hoidenish sister named Becky, who, by her madcap pranks, kept the household in an uproar of laughter. Many a boyish prank tripped through the years and peeped in upon the sleeping man. Often the Dean would laugh out aloud. Then he would clench his teeth, and strange oaths and curses would hiss from his mouth. Sometimes he was afoot, and then he would dash across the country on horseback. Imminent peril threatened the sleeping man, and he held out forfending hands, hiding himself behind the back of his hands from something that threatened. Then he heaved a deep sigh, and behind the sigh there tripped a hearty laugh, and the Dean went up many streams a-fishing, and returned ere sundown with his creel bulging with great fish.

Prime ringing from the tower awoke the Abbot-Elect to his day of triumph. In answer to the bell Brother William brought in a lighted candle.

"Good morning, Abbot Richard," said Brother William, as he placed the brass candlestick upon the table. The Abbot-Elect graciously inclined his head, and smiled, albeit a little wanly, and, lifting his hands pronounced his first *Pax Vobiscum* as Abbot of Thornton, and then Brother William retired.

When he was dressed the Abbot-Elect carefully drew the curtains closely across the windows of his bedroom. He also lifted the bar across the door, and took the further precaution to try the door to assure himself that it was fast. Then, candle in hand, he crossed the room to the wardrobe. There he set the candle upon the table, and with his foot pushed aside a wolf skin that, life-like, lay upon the floor. After a further glance about the room, as though to make sure that his movements were not observed, at the spot from whence he had kicked the wolf skin, he opened a trap door concealed in the floor. Candle in hand, the Abbot-Elect disappeared down a flight of stone steps which the open trap disclosed. Presently there issued from below the sound of voices,—of all things in the world, in that place, the voice of a man *and of a woman*, conversing earnestly in low tones, and with considerable animation. A note of disagreement was largely dominant in their conversation.

After an absence of a full quarter of an hour the Abbot-Elect reappeared. Perspiration beaded his forehead, and he seemed greatly perturbed. "I must get her away, or she will ruin me," he muttered, as he closed the door again and drew the wolf-skin to its wonted place. Then he added, half whimsically and half in earnest, "The Fates seem to mix up Thornton Abbots with women!"

He drew back the curtains, unbolted the door, rang the little bell on the table, and shortly Brother Geoffrey appeared. The two monks held a conference that lasted an entire hour.

At tierce, the entire Brotherhood of Thornton marched to the Chapter House, and there concluded the formalities that made Dean Fletcher their Abbot. Then, under the eye of Dean Fletcher, the monks formed to march into the church for the ceremony of installation. The novices and acolytes led the solemn procession, youthful and demure, and sufficiently impressed with the importance of the occasion and with their own share in the proceedings of the day, swinging censers and bearing candles as they walked. Two by two, they were followed by the seasoned monks, slowly moving to the rhythm of the great organ in the church. The greater officials followed in order, the lesser dignitaries first, the higher bringing up the rear. Last of all, and alone, as though already he were the shepherd of these sheep and were driving them to pasture, walked the Abbot-Elect. Amice, alb, girdle, maniple, stole, and chasuble, draped over

bright scarlet gowns, with solemn touches of purple here and there, distinguished the monks at the rear of the procession, and set out the wearers of these ecclesiastical regalia for the parts they were to bear in the ceremonial. But the Abbot-Elect walked in unrelieved sober black, the time for his assumption of the gorgeous robes appertaining to his new office not having yet arrived.

Upon leaving the Chapter House the monks broke into a chant. But the Abbot-Elect did not sing. His figure was more bent than usual. His thin lips were tightly closed, and his eyes were fixed upon the pavement. It was his day of triumph, but his face showed it not. Rather did it seem that the great occasion added a burden which the man might prove to be unable to bear, and that in this solemn hour his human weakness was so borne in upon him that he shrank from the tasks the day would usher into his life.

The Brotherhood of Thornton rose to the occasion. Never was ritual read more effectively, nor psalms better sung. Grandly and solemnly, the service swung into the celebration of High Mass. Censers swung, and spiral wreaths of incense curled to the fretted roof. Little bells tinkled, and, in brilliant vestments, the celebrants moved back and forth before the high altar, busy about the holy offices. Chant and response the choir tossed back and forth across the chancel in tones rich with feeling, till the sun in the wintry sky cast a faint shadow upon the dial on the garth at the Roman figure XI.

Then came the event to which all this ceremony had tended. St. John and Brother William paired before the altar. Slowly and solemnly they faced the stalls. They marched down the white steps, shoulder to shoulder, foot to foot. Straight down the chancel they passed between the monks seated in their stalls, to where sat the Abbot-Elect, with his head buried deep in his hood and bent forward upon his breast, evidently in solemn meditation as befitted both the man and the occasion. The Brothers touched the Abbot-Elect on the shoulders. Immediately he straightened himself in his chair, threw the hood back upon his shoulders, and arose to accompany the escort to the high altar. The pair of monks wheeled about in fine form, as though they had been a company of halberdiers. They led off back to the altar, the Abbot-Elect following, his eyes on the pavement, his hands clasped behind his back, the living picture of dignified humility.

The ashy face of the man about to become their Abbot touched the heart of the Brotherhood. Dean Fletcher was not taking the high office lightly. He was duly weighted with the solemn responsibility the ceremony would thrust upon him.

As the three passed slowly up the chancel, the ritual broke forth again:

"Who shall ascend unto the hill of God?
Who shall stand in His holy place?"

swelled from the Gospel side of the choir.

Prompt and triumphant the Epistle replied:

"He that hath clean hands and a pure heart,
Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity,
And hath not sworn deceitfully.
He shall receive—"

Then happened a strange thing which halted the chant in the midst of its triumph. A few paces behind the Abbot-Elect marched a strange monk. But for the difference in figure, the stranger being of lower stature and larger bulk, the new monk was the counterpart of the Abbot-Elect. His eyes, too, read on the pavement as he walked, and his shoulders were stooped. His hands were clasped humbly behind his back and, in his walk, he seemed to mimic the monk before him. But there was this mysterious difference; the stranger wore his hood drawn close about his head, so that none could tell whether or not his face was ashy white.

When the three monks reached the altar and the Abbot-Elect was about to kneel, the stranger monk came upon them with a quick stride or two, and put a firm hand upon the Dean's shoulder, crying with a loud voice, "Hold, you rascal, hold!"

The Dean made as though he would throw off the hand of the stranger monk, and for a moment it looked as though there would be an unseemly struggle before the altar.

"If you move, you wicked coward, I'll fell you to the earth," the strange monk said. Then, turning to the stalls, where the monks leaned forward in wide-eyed horror, and when some had already risen to their feet, he lifted his hand with a

gesture of authority, and said: "Let the installation of the new Abbot stop, here and now. Hear me, you men of Thornton. In this public place, before the high altar, in the presence of you all, I do denounce Dean Fletcher, now, forsooth, Abbot-Elect of Thornton Abbey, as an unmitigated wicked scoundrel! Hold!" he cried, as *en masse*, the monks arose in the stalls, about to rush upon him. "Hold, I say! Sit still, every soul of you! Hear me till I'm done. I'm only one man. When I have had my say you may do to me what you will."

Then, turning to the Abbot-Elect, who had sunk into a pitiful limp heap on the step by the altar, and was evidently in great distress, he pointed his finger squarely in his face. "There, cowering on the altar step, shaking with the ague of a wicked man's fear, weak now as a woman, and wicked as the devil himself—there sits the Green Devil, whose lust and greed have plundered amongst us these three years! Nay, stay there, Dean Fletcher! Move not, and speak not a word till I have had my say! Hear me what I say! I'll thrust your Green Devil crimes home to you, you clever fiend, so that, monk though you be, you'll hang, or worse!"

Turning to the stalls, the stranger monk flung off his Austin habit, and lo! Dwarf Henry of the Manor House stood before the astounded monks! But neither his misshapen body, nor his reputation among them for prankishness, nor his constant association with the monks as an every-day clown,

counted for aught this day. He dominated the situation as though he were a stalwart knight or were the veritable Bishop of the diocese.

With an upraised hand the Dwarf stilled the outcry of surprise among the monks. "Hear me further, neighbors mine," he cried. "I have indisputable proof that Dean Fletcher and the Green Devil are one and the same person!"

Words fail to picture the consternation and commotion that ensued. The Dwarf alone remained calm. "Follow me, for proof," he said, advancing down the steps. "Good St. John, do you bring along Dean Fletcher. Suffer him not to escape, on peril of your life to the king. Nay, Dean Fletcher, an you try to escape I myself will fell you to the ground! Here, there, half a dozen of you stalwart Brothers, form bodyguard for Dean Fletcher,—guard of honor!" he added, with a flash of his old wit,—"Take him over to the Deanery. The rest may follow, an' you will, but see that Dean Fletcher gives you not the slip."

The monks followed in a fashion not according to the rubrics. They did not stop to lay aside their altar vestments. As the crowd surged across the garth Brothers Geoffry and Benedict, the Dean's right-hand men, glided unobserved to the Gate House. At their command the porter lowered the bridge, and speedily the twain disappeared into the woods fearing, as may be supposed, that the strange revelations of Dwarf Henry might involve their own safety.

In the Dean's House the Dwarf led the way straight to the wardrobe. He was followed by St. John with the prisoner, and by such monks as could crowd indoors. The rest of the Brotherhood swarmed about the Deanery outside, and had to be content with such news of what happened indoors as could be passed to them by those inside.

The Dwarf evidently knew his way about. With his foot he pushed aside the wolf-skin from the trap door, whereupon Dean Fletcher fell into a swoon that certainly was not simulated.

"Douche his face with cold water,—plenty of it —he'll come to in a little while. He's scared a little, but he'll recover in time to be hanged!" exclaimed the Dwarf cheerily.

When some one brought a lighted torch, the Dwarf took it, and he led the way down the stone steps, a dozen monks following close after him. St. John and the guards kept watch by the prisoner in the bedroom, and waited developments.

All doubt of the Dean's guilt vanished the moment the light from the torch fell upon the walls of the subterranean chamber, which the Dean had ventilated and used as a treasure house. Stowed away on shelves flanking the walls lay a hundred articles that had been plundered by the Green Devil during his raids. There they lay, mute evidence of the foulest guilt, proof of crime enough to hang a hundred men. Heavy silver service plundered from a dozen churches; the gold-embroidered vestments stolen six months ago from

St. Botolph's at Boston, when the Green Devil had raided the town; rich silks and woolens that had swelled pedlers' packs when the Green Devil had relieved the unfortunate pedlers of pack and of life; trinkets in gold and in silver whose loss was still mourned by the fair dames of the countryside —all lay before them. There could be no mistaking the evidence. The monks could read it more plainly than they could read the black letters of the Breviary.

A stifled sob issued from the farthest corner of the room. The Dwarf stood still and listened, and the monks held their breath, the situation was so very uncanny.

It was the Dwarf who investigated. Holding the torch high in the air he proceeded cautiously in the direction whence came the sound. Presently in the gloom at the farthest corner of the room he distinguished a straw pallet, and on the pallet lay stretched the form of a *woman!* In sheer astonishment the Dwarf blew a shrill whistle, and walked gingerly over to the pallet. The woman's face was turned to the wall, and her body was convulsed with sobs which she was doing her best to smother. Moreover her neck was swathed with heavy bandages. It was quite evident that she was sick. When the Dwarf put his hand upon her shoulder she turned from the wall, and the light from the torch fell full upon her face. A cry of

surprise escaped the Dwarf's lips. The monks crowded to the bedside, horrified, for they not only looked upon the face of a woman under Dean Fletcher's apartments, but the woman's face was that of the notorious Keelby witch!

CHAPTER XXVIII.
THE ORDEAL BY BREAD

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THE ORDEAL BY BREAD

WHEREIN A SUPERSTITIOUS ANCIENT JUDICIAL PROCESS WORKS OUT SUBSTANTIAL JUSTICE, AND THE MORAL SEEMS TO BE THAT, WHEREIN VICE FALLS SHORT OF BEING ITS OWN PUNISHMENT, ETERNAL JUSTICE STEPS IN TO HEAP UP WHAT IS LACKING OF FULL MEASURE

When the Dwarf returned upstairs, the Dean had revived, and was sitting between his guards biding the issue with dogged silence. The monks spread on the table an armful of the evidence of his guilt, but the Dean spoke not a word. He only moistened his lips, and, with his eyes fixed on the floor, awaited developments. His thin face was white and haggard and bore marks of suffering, but something of defiance still lurked in his eyes. As Dwarf Henry approached him, the Dean winced and again moistened his lips with his tongue, then he braced himself and looked the Dwarf in the eye.

"Dean Fletcher," said the Dwarf,—and all trace of levity was gone from his voice.—"In the presence of these witnesses, I do hereby charge that the Green Devil and Dean Fletcher are one and the same person."

The monks who crowded about the room had been silent while the Dwarf spoke, and now there arose among them an angry buzz which chilled the Dean to the marrow.

In a moment the Dwarf put up his hand, and again silence fell upon the room, broken only by the deep breathing of the monks. "This green garment," said he, "I myself tore from Dean Fletcher the other morning as he came back to the Abbey after one of his Green Devil forays!" As he spoke the Dwarf held aloft the torn fragment he had plucked from Green Devil's disguise the morning he had chased him into the Abbey. At sight of the green the monks became greatly excited.

Then the Dwarf picked a green garment from the table. "This green garment," he continued, "we discovered down stairs just now. See! It is the Green Devil's well-known disguise! Note well, how the garment is torn! See, this fragment of mine fits exactly into the rent, even to these few drawn threads! Here are the hanging threads—one, two, three, four, five warp threads, and five places in the woof from whence the warp was torn! This rent garment, and all this other Green Devil plunder, is evidence enough to hang a hundred men! What answer make you, Dean Fletcher? Speak promptly!"

Slowly the Dean arose to his feet, and solemnly his hand took the position of a person taking an oath. "Brethren of the Abbey, and you, Dwarf

Henry of the Manor House, hear me, one and all," he said. "I am not the Green Devil. Truly I am not guilty of these crimes. Circumstances seem to be against me, but give me time and I will prove my innocence. All I need is a little time and the mystery will clear itself. It would seem that, to cover their own evil deeds, all unbeknown to me others have used my house to hide their crimes. I have naught to do with them, or with their evil plunder. This is the first time I have seen these trinkets, so help me God. And about the rent garment—Dwarf Henry is mistaken. It was not I —it must have been some other man."

"How will you purge yourself of this charge, Dean Fletcher?" inquired St. John, very quietly, but in a manner indicating that neither he nor his question could be turned aside. "The evidence seems to be most conclusive, and is not offset by mere ingenious denial. You will need to meet the charge seriously," he added, speaking with great firmness.

Dean Fletcher bit his lip, which, moreover, seemed to be very dry. Once, twice, three times, his tongue shot across his mouth, but the moisture would not stay. He glanced around the room uneasily. Every face seemed set against him, and every avenue of escape appeared to be closed.

At length, summoning resolution, the Dean said, quietly, "I will take the ordeal by bread, and may God declare the right."

A faint smile flickered across the Dean's face as

he spoke, and his decision to take the awful oath started a buzz of excited conversation among the monks.

"An hour hence, and in the chancel," quietly announced St. John. "I myself will superintend the ordeal."

At the word the monks dispersed, discussing the strange events as they went. All scattered, except the guards, to whom St. John committed the care of the Dean until the time of the ordeal should arrive. In an incredibly short time every monk in the Abbey knew the details of the Dean's exposure, and the shocking facts lost nothing as a second scourge of tongues gave them currency among the monks.

The presence of the Keelby witch in the Dean's quarters proved to be a rich morsel under the monks' tongues. The brethren had no knowledge of the blood relationship which existed between the witch and the Dean. Nor did they know the creditable circumstances under which the Dean had brought the woman to the Abbey. It would seem that, traveling the Ermine Street some little distance behind the Rossmen the evening of the day following the Lincoln Assize, the Dean and a company of his boon companions, who were disguised that day as honest yeomen, came upon the Keelby witch hanging on a gibbet by the roadside, shortly after the Rossmen had left her there. Finding that her neck was not broken, and that life was not extinct, the Dean's leechcraft succeeded

in restoring her to consciousness. After having disguised her as a sick monk, they carried her into the Abbey at night, unobserved by the monks. There the Dean was secretly nursing her back to health when this exposure suddenly turned his kindly act into a prime reason for his condemnation. For, had not the Brotherhood promptly and adequately dealt with Abbot Thomas when he had miscomported himself with the woman Heloise? Not less drastic should be the Chapter's action now that the Dean had fallen before the charms of the notorious Keelby witch! Whether the Dean cleared himself of the Dwarf's charge or not, the witch would certainly be his undoing!

To witness the ordeal the total population of the Abbey crowded into the church, and, filling the chancel, the monks overflowed into the nave. Even the watchmen at the Gate House left lock and bar and lifted bridge to say, "Nay," to whomever might approach the enclosure, and then squeezed their way through the throng to witness the supernatural ceremony at the church.

When Dean Fletcher walked up the aisle, with his hands clasped behind his back, his eyes on the tesselated pavement, and by his side two stalwart monks for guards, a great hush fell upon the throng. With his guards standing at either side of him, the Dean seated himself in a sedile at the south end of the altar, from whence he could both see and be seen. A smile flitted across his face when he noted that Brothers Geoffrey and Bene-

dict were not in their places. It was a good omen, since the absentees would not break the silence against him, and, moreover, it was just possible that they might succeed in bringing him some aid in his extremity. The Dean settled down to wait for the ordeal, meanwhile wishing for a score of his green archers. Then, how he would scatter the pious crowd! So far as his face told the tale, he had come to the ordeal with the confidence that the test would bring about his vindication.

The good and gentle St. John moved about the high altar preparing for the solemn ceremony. To the simple unquestioning religious faith of the monks crowding the stalls, the ordeal was supremely awesome. To them the consecrated bread was the veritable Body of the Lord. It was literally a miraculous bit of Almighty God, and the partaking of it, even under the ordinary circumstances of the Mass, was the most solemn act on earth. The mysterious sacrifice of the Mass was to them the center and circumference of the supernatural world —how much more so in this peculiarly solemn hour! All about the little disc of bread lay a strange and uncanny world of things mysterious and powerful. Their natural reverence for the solemn rite had long since passed into superstition, and the bread had become vested with the miraculous properties of the touchstone. Each monk stretching his neck in the stalls, the better to see every move at the altar, knew in his heart, beyond a peradventure, that the consecrated Host would infallibly separate

the right from the wrong, and correctly fix Dean Fletcher's guilt or proclaim his innocence. Hence the impressive silence with which the entire Brotherhood watched St. John make the necessary preparations at the altar.

With Dean Fletcher the case stood quite differently. In him sheer wickedness had long ago destroyed faith, and had also undermined the foundation of superstition, so that now he neither believed nor feared. Long since, religion had become to him a mere convenient mask behind which he had played a double life. Inwardly, the Dean laughed at the solemn preparations for the ordeal, and scoffed at the easy faith the monks professed in the test which he knew was about to defeat justice by proclaiming him innocent.

It was all very easy! He would take the little disc of bread St. John would offer him on the paten, and swallow it with as little concern as he would eat a venison pasty or drink a horn of the Abbey brew! As to the possible intervention of the civil arm, if the worse came to the worst he would plead "benefit of Clergy," and so would escape punishment in that quarter, and he had no doubt whatever that he would be able to handle the less powerful judgments of the church. It was a bold play by a bad man for high stakes, and the Dean played against odds greater than he knew, but his calm demeanor while St. John made the preparations at the altar indicated that the astute man saw his way through.

Presently St. John turned, and there ensued a hush as of the dead. The decisive moment had arrived. St. John, his face very solemn, because his duty this day weighed heavily upon his heart, took a glittering paten from the monstrance which stood on the credence table, intoning a prayer the while, and making the sign of the cross. The good monk's hand trembled as he lifted the paten which bore the consecrated wafer. The silence in the church could be felt, and all eyes followed every movement of the extraordinary celebration. St. John turned again, and at a slight motion from him, Dean Fletcher arose. The guards walked by his side to the altar, and the Dean knelt on the steps, while, with bowed heads, the guards stood on either side, watching.

Slowly, St. John approached the Dean, and solemnly, silently, he held out to him the paten, the solitary wafer on which was the cynosure of every eye. The monks strained their eyes and held their breath to see the miracle work. Dean Fletcher deliberately stretched forth his hand to take the holy wafer, and the monks craned their necks to see. When, in their excitement, the monks shuffled their feet, St. John put up his hand, whereupon the noise quieted, and a painful silence fell upon the church. The monks could but see that the Dean's hand trembled as he raised the wafer to his lips. Then his countenance flushed and a queer look came into his face. He appeared to be uncomfortable, and to have suddenly become

greatly concerned about something. His hand halted on its way to his mouth, as though it hesitated to cast the fateful die. Then the Dean's face faded back to a deathly white, and across it passed a sickly smile. At length the unhappy man summoned a great resolution, and with a quick motion he slid the consecrated wafer into his mouth.

The human mind is a profound mystery. Its motor springs lie beyond its own farthest ken, and the wisest philosopher knows less about himself than he does about the fixed stars. When Dean Fletcher entered the church he was confident of victory. From the sedile he watched St. John's silent movements about the altar with a curiously impersonal interest and without a tinge of fear. When the Dean arose to his feet, his spirit was secretly singing a song of triumph. He even had the temerity to glance forward to the course he would pursue when these mummeries were ended and he would be free to go about his business. So confident was he, that he hardly gave up the Abbacy as completely lost. He was so master of the situation, that he did not chafe at the restraint he was under, since it would last but an hour, and then he would get even with his tormentors. But for the bad effect on his cause such a course might have, he would have chatted with his guards while the ordeal was in preparation.

But between the sedile and the altar, where he now knelt, something strange happened far within the mystery of Dean Fletcher's consciousness.

Fear sprang up within him, sudden as a flash of lightning, but, instead of lighting, it darkened every field and nook and cranny of his inner being with a darkness that was appalling. In spite of his outward composure, the awful supernatural world suddenly became very real to him, and also very imminent, and it loomed terrible with a nigh and mighty vengeance. The old-fashioned hell yawned before him, as he used to believe in it, and tongues of its devouring flame licked at his cassock.

Strange to say, the supernatural light of the flames revealed to the culprit the true character of the life he had lived, and brought its evil home to his consciousness. Far more evil than the Green Devil of his masquerading, and more terrible and vengeful than the Red Devil who had chased him to the door of the Abbey, was the real personal Devil, the Master Power of Evil, Lord of Death and Hell; and that horrid Devil waited, grinning and confident, amid the incalescent flame of the Pit to receive the Dean to endless and eternal torture. There was no myth about it now; everything was real and literal. This awful ordeal made real and substantial everything in the religion at which the Dean long had scoffed. The thin wafer upon the paten was the indubitable Body of Jesus Christ, which he, a miserable sinner, was about to eat unworthily, to the everlasting damnation of his soul.

But Dean Fletcher was a brave man and resolute. He knew that to avoid the ordeal now would be to

confess his guilt. Therefore he would eat the wafer at once and be done with it, whatever might be the result. He put forth his hand. Deliberately, he hesitated a moment, cunningly thinking thereby to appear deliberate, but the ruse only added to his inner confusion, and made his final defeat the more certain. Then he took the holy wafer into his mouth, and immediately the morsel seemed hot as a live coal of fire! He tried to gulp it down, tried, and tried yet again. Added to the miracle of the wafer's heat, the morsel seemed to become dry and powdery as ashes in his mouth. The wicked man choked.

Horrified at this manifestation of supernatural power, with kindly intent, St. John and the guards came to his assistance. But it was no use. The guilty man spat out the sacred Body of the Lord upon the pavement, and sank into a limp helpless heap upon the steps of the altar, in hopeless collapse.

The monks broke into wild execration. It seemed as though they would tear the broken Dean to pieces. St. John alone stood between him and immediate death. From the steps of the altar he beckoned for silence. When the monks had quieted he said, "The Brotherhood of St. Mary will meet in Chapter immediately to adjudicate upon Dean Fletcher's crime. Retire now in order, every one of you, and make ready to do justice."

Promptly the monks answered the new hand on

the helm and dispersed. To the guards St. John said, simply, "Bear Dean Fletcher to the Chapter House. If he needs refreshments let him have what he wants—short of poison."

The Dean essayed to rise to his feet, but fell again limp upon the altar steps. His mouth was parched, and his blood-shot eyes rolled about as though he were at the point of death. He clutched with both hands about the region of his heart, and the monks lingered in the chancel to see Heaven's final act of justice in the Dean's quick death. But Heaven seemed to leave him to his fate, for shortly he recovered from his spasms.

A monk with a kindly heart broke through the awe the strange spectacle inspired, and carried the Dean a tankard of water. The Dean drained its contents, but his mouth parched again ere the vessel was well out of his hand. In a thin weak voice the Dean asked for a stimulant, and a Brother brought him a tankard of strong wine. But the wine was powerless to chase the deathly pallor from his cheeks. The wine, however, flushed a little strength into his limbs and, assisted by his guards, he arose to his feet. Leaning heavily upon their shoulders, he passed slowly down the transept toward the Chapter House.

Then St. John walked briskly into the nave, where Dwarf Henry, a much interested observer of the proceedings, leaned against a pillar, waiting for him.

"What next?" the Dwarf asked, laconically.

"Strict justice, and full," St. John replied, a stern accent in his voice that boded ill for Dean Fletcher.

"He'll plead 'Benefit of Clergy,'" the Dwarf answered, and then added, sharply, "But, St. John, an' you fail to hang him, we'll burn the Abbey about your heads, and hold you for a set of sniveling traitors."

"Fear not, my son," answered St. John, laying his hand kindly on the Dwarf's shoulder. "But you must leave the Abbey now. Remember how that 'A still tongue wags in a wise head,' my lad. I would that you were one of us, that you might see an Abbey's justice."

"I would not be a monk to see the pope hanged!" Dwarf Henry laughed back, waving farewell jauntily from half way over the bridge, whither St. John had accompanied him. Then the bridge creaked up again and St. John turned back into the Abbey.

CHAPTER XXIX. RETRIBUTION

CHAPTER XXIX

RETRIBUTION

IN WHICH IT IS MADE TO APPEAR THAT IF STONE WALLS HAVE EARS THEY ALSO HAVE TONGUES AND THAT THEY MAY BECOME THE STRANGE UNDOING OF A MAN'S FINE PROSPECTS

St. John presided at the Chapter which convened to pass upon the crimes of Dean Fletcher, but he was the gentle St. John no longer, for his face wore a strange expression of determination, and his mouth was set with a firm will that seemed to bode ill for the guilty Dean. The monks overcrowded the sedilia, and occupied the standing room at every point of vantage, while the lay brethren surged about the outskirts of the throng, watching the proceedings intently.

Dean Fletcher was ushered into the Chapter House by his guards, and the monks received him in moody silence. Evidently, his day was passed, and he could only hope for justice at the hands of his peers. The Dean was stronger now. Indeed, as he sat at the end of the table which stood before the judges, the strange man appeared to be almost himself again.

Half-a-dozen laymen came in, and piled the Green Devil's plunder on the tables before the

tribunal. When the monks saw this substantial evidence of the Dean's guilt, they broke out into open execration of the prisoner. St. John beckoned sternly, and the monks subsided again into tense silence, whereat the Dean moistened his lips and twisted about nervously in his seat. He had come to feel that he had not a single friend in the assembly, and his green archers were too far away to serve him a good turn.

St. John arose to speak, and men never forgot the expression of his face nor the tone of his voice. Never had the Brotherhood seen such a St. John. Dean Fletcher looked up in surprise, and a shudder palpably shook his spare frame. Briefly, and sternly, St. John detailed the story of the Green Devil's awful crimes. When he announced that Dwarf Henry, under the strongest oath, had identified the Dean in the guise of the Green Devil, the prisoner well-nigh collapsed, and many of the monks vented their pent feeling in hisses. St. John told how that the Dwarf had pleaded to be allowed to testify in person, but that it had been judged better to keep the trial secret, in order that the scandal might be buried behind the Abbey walls. However, the evidences of the Dean's guilt were here, tangible, and in plenty. Moreover, as they had all witnessed, the solemn ordeal had divined the culprit and declared his guilt. What had Dean Fletcher to say for himself? The Brotherhood would hear patiently, and would weigh most justly.

Slowly and painfully, the Dean arose to defend

himself, and the silence which greeted him was tragic with pent-up passion, which, the Dean felt, was ready to be transmuted into a strong sentence of punishment. A twig tapped on a casement, and its faint staccato sounded clear as the blows of a sledge. A flock of sparrows flew past an open window, and at the fluttering of their wings the monks shivered. A raven on a chimney pot cawed to his mate, and the Dean put up his hand against the evil portent. All eyes were fixed on the Dean. His ashy face lighted into a wan smile as he began, and a little of his old confidence put momentary strength into his tottering limbs. It was his last throw of the dice. No other avenue of escape being open, he seemed to have determined to make confession. He would throw himself upon the mercy of the Brotherhood, and accept whatever penance might be imposed.

"As to the woman you found at the Deanery," he said, leaning heavily on the table with both his hands. "The Keelby witch is my sister according to the flesh."

The huge guffaw which greeted this incredible announcement nettled Dean Fletcher. He put up his hand in deprecation, and again the monks fell to silence.

"Hear me, men of Thornton. I speak the solemn truth. Born of one father and mother were the Keelby witch and I,—of a Jewish mother, herself a famous witch, whose trade my madcap sister must needs follow."

"A Jew! A Jew!" the monks cried. "He shows the pilfer of his blood!"

It took a stern gavel to silence the taunts and restore order. Then, pale, and unable to hide his feelings, the Dean continued: "In my youth, I, too, was wild, but the years sobered me, and later I entered the church, intending the pious life. There was I lost to my family. Also I lost sight of my sister Becky. Only about a year ago it was that I learned that the Keelby witch was my sister.

"Returning from Lincoln Assizes, a month or so ago, we came upon my madcap sister hanging apparently dead upon a gibbet by the roadside. Because she was of my blood, with my own hands I took her down, and would have given her decent burial, but that she brazenly balked death. We brought her to the Abbey secretly, and here I have nursed her back to life again, hoping that she might mend her wild ways, and, perchance, might take the veil. So help me God, it is the truth I speak. The strange woman is truly my blood sister. Which of you would not have done by her as I have done?"

It was an adroit appeal to sympathies that lie universal in the human breast. The Brotherhood could hardly be other than lenient toward such a sinner with woman! But St. John's face did not relax. He rapped sharply with his gavel, and the wave of sympathy for the Dean immediately subsided.

"What about the Green Devil and his outrageous crimes?" asked St. John. "Are you guilty there?"

As the question fell upon his ears the Dean sank back into his chair, and it was a full minute before he spoke. He moistened his lips frequently, hitched about uncomfortably in his seat, and his labored breathing could be heard in every part of the room. Awhile it looked as though he would collapse before he could answer. At length he turned to St. John. "Confession is good for the soul," he said. "I throw myself on the mercy of the Thornton Chapter. Yes! I have been the Green Devil!"

Words cannot describe the effect produced by the Dean's confession. The wildest excitement prevailed. When he had restored order, St. John looked the culprit sternly in the face, and the monks breathlessly awaited further questioning. "Why did you plunder these things?" asked St. John, pointing to the pile of stolen goods on the table. "For none of them can you have the slightest use. You had plenty; why, in the name of Heaven, must you thieve!"

"I know not what the scholars call it," the Dean answered. "But it is a foolish, useless desire to take,—to use or abuse,—everything one sees. The lust to possess burned out my soul, and the passion for adventure mastered me hopelessly."

A wave of fresh excitement swept the Chapter House, and a Brother, more forward than the rest, exclaimed, "He's as guilty as Hell!" and thereat all heads were set a-nodding in instant approval.

Then the Dean stood up and poured forth a full confession of his crimes, throwing himself upon

the mercy of the Brotherhood, evidently in the hope that his confession and penitence might at least save his life. His crimes were most heinous, and he merited the most severe punishment. But so artful was his confession and so clever his subtle appeal, that he might have got off with the imposition of a heavy penance, but for a new factor which, in the interests of Justice, appeared at this juncture.

The close of the Dean's confession was interrupted by sundry groans and sobs which broke out among the lay brothers, and caused a commotion in that quarter of the Chapter House. The Assessors tried to quiet the disturbance, but the sobbing continued, swelling louder and louder, and evidently growing beyond control. St. John stood up on the dais, that he might overlook the crowd and the better judge what the disturbance might mean.

"William Winter," said St. John, kindly, "Report to me, here and now. I would know what may be amiss."

In answer to the summons a lay brother pushed his way to the front, down an aisle that automatically opened before and closed behind him. Tears trickled down the man's cheeks, and he was evidently under the stress of great emotion. He knelt by the table behind which St. John sat, and had he been the veritable Devil himself, in open apparition, his advent could have had no more astounding effect upon Dean Fletcher. The Dean's eyes bulged,

his jaw dropped, and his breath came in short, quick gasps. However, the Dean quickly recovered himself enough to lean over the table and whisper in the lay brother's ear, "For heaven's sake, don't tell. Remember the arrow is poisoned, and oath-breakers go straight to hell!"

"Heed not Dean Fletcher!" exclaimed St. John sharply. "Tell us your trouble."

The man was sore distraught. At length he sobbed out, "May a lay brother ever be disburdened of an oath?"

"An oath's an oath, and binds one ever," answered St. John.

"If it be a foul oath?"

"Men should not make such an oath; but being made, it must be kept."

"If on earth it damn men's souls?"

"Once taken, my brother, an oath must stand," answered St. John, firmly, and the entire Chapter hung breathless on his word.

Neither man spoke awhile, and the Dean's face brightened. Danger from that quarter was growing less. Presently the lay brother arose to his feet, and resolutely looked St. John in the face, as he earnestly queried: "But, St. John, if an oath harm the dead, and shield a living criminal from justice, may it not be broken?"

St. John slowly shook his head, to which the lay Brother responded quietly, almost whispering the words, "Were I absolved from a hideous oath I

might tell you where Abbot Thomas is, and who sped away his life!"

"William Winter! I do fully absolve you from such an oath! Now, quickly tell the Brotherhood what you know!" cried St. John.

Dean Fletcher sank back limp in his chair, choking with mingled wrath and fear. A gulp of wine brought him to himself again, and he listened, wild-eyed and open-mouthed, to what the layman had to say.

"One day before the villeins stormed the Abbey, Dean Fletcher came to me, and praised me for the still tongue he said I had in my head. He said that it was much better than as though I had my tongue hinged in the middle, so it would wag both ways, as monks' tongues mostly do! That is what he said!" the man continued, in answer to the titter that stirred about the room.

"The Dean told me that Abbot Thomas's bedroom was haunted by a Ghost, and that the Abbot wanted the Ghost trapped, and bricked up in the room, to save the Abbey from its wanderings. Sometime, when the Ghost was in the room, the Dean would quickly lock the door, and then I was to be ready to brick up the doorway. Everything was to be kept very secret, and to that end Dean Fletcher swore me on a fearful oath.

"When the time came, Brother Benedict fetched Jim and me to see the Dean. Jim's my helper, and he's a good one, too! The Dean talked big about obedience and secrecy. If we were obedient and

kept the secret, he would admit us to the Brotherhood—but we're lay brothers yet! Then he swore us secret on an oath of poisoned arrows, and said that if we split we would be shot by one of the arrows. I can feel the deadly things scratch me even now!

"That very afternoon Jim an' me bricked up the window in the Abbot's bedroom so that a ghost could get neither in nor out. After supper Dean Fletcher told us to be ready that night, because he thought that was the Ghost's time to walk.

"Jim an' me waited in the Dean's kitchen, a good deal afraid, because we liked not Ghosts nor their walking. Presently, through the keyhole, I saw a light in the hall. I put my eye to the hole, and saw a company of Brothers walking down the hall with Abbot Thomas in their midst. Then all the monks left but Dean Fletcher and Brothers Geoffrey and Benedict. When these four came to the bedroom I saw Abbot Thomas step in, and wondered that he was not afraid of the Ghost. Then, quick as an owl winks, Dean Fletcher shut the door upon the Abbot, and forthwith turned the key in the lock."

The man wiped the perspiration from his brow, and Dean Fletcher moistened his lips and turned about in his chair, while the Brotherhood crowded nearer. St. John half arose out of his chair, and leaned across the table the better to catch every word.

"I hardly got my eyes from the keyhole before

the Dean opened the kitchen door and ordered us to work," the witness continued. "My! But he made us work! With his own hands he helped us! O, but he was in a hurry! Such pounding on the door! I'd rather face a thousand fearsome Ghosts than bury the half of one man alive! But for the oath I could not have lifted a pound of mortar that night, and every minute since then have I repented my oath and what I did because of it.

"After it was all over, I fell a-thinking that mayhap my eyes had deceived me, and that the fearful knocking on the door while we built up the wall was really done by the Ghost, as Dean Fletcher had said. But the next day the Abbot was missing, and he has not been heard of since!

"This very minute you men of Thornton can find Abbot Thomas, an' you will! Pull down the wall, and you'll find his carcass there! When I heard Dean Fletcher confess just now, and stop short of the most awful crime of all, I could no longer hold myself. Good St. John, I have your absolution from my oath. Now give me your forgiveness for not splitting sooner."

St. John gave the man the sign of his blessing.

"The man lies, the man lies, he lies wondrously!" Dean Fletcher cried, springing to his feet, "Make me not blacker than I am. I'm sick. Let me go hence."

"Softly! Not yet!" said St. John. "The trial is not ended. We will test the truth of Winter's story in a little while."

"Is Scrivener's 'prentice here?" continued St. John as he arose and let his eye range the monks until it fell upon Brother William, who was standing by the door.

"Aye! Aye! Shall I bring him in?" answered Brother William, and from the dais St. John signalled his assent.

Presently Brother William returned with the youth who had come upon the men in green as they were stealing the Manor House will. With evident embarrassment the youth advanced toward St. John. As he moved up the aisle of monks his eye fell upon Dean Fletcher, and the youth suddenly halted and stood stock still, as though he were unable to take another step. He stared at the Dean so hard that the Dean fidgeted uneasily in his chair, and perforce must cast his eyes upon the floor.

"Saw you ever this man before?" asked St. John, pointing to the Dean.

When he could command speech, the youth answered, emphatically, "Aye! Aye! I saw him! He is the very man I saw!"

"Where! and when? Tell us!" urged St. John.

"He is the Green Devil of the two men in green whom I came upon in the act of stealing the Manor House will at Scrivener Twidale's in Lincoln town!" exclaimed the youth, greatly excited. Then he added; "He is the very man!"

"Be sure!" warned St. John, solemnly.

"Sure! I'm sure enough!" exclaimed the youth.

"I could never mistake that face! He is the very man!"

St. John dismissed the youth with a word, and then he turned to the Brethren. "Is the Chapter ready to vote?" he said.

"Aye! Aye!" came the answer in a vigorous chorus.

"Black balls are guilty; white, not guilty," directed St. John, as the monks prepared to cast their votes. Presently, there followed the sharp staccato of the little spheres as they dropped like hail into the ballot-box. In a little while the box was brought to the table, and the Dean watched the monks ascertain the result of the ballot.

"All are black! Not a single white ball!" announced St. John, solemnly. "The question now is as to what shall be the punishment. Shall it be Death; or shall it be a lighter sentence? Prepare to vote, and may an even-handed Justice guide your ballot! The black ball carries Death."

Again, one by one, the noisy balls dropped into the box, and again the loaded box was returned to the table. The Dean leaned forward on the table, and buried his face in his arms, as though he could no longer face the issue.

St. John arose, and a deathly silence awaited his announcement. "It is DEATH!" he said, solemnly, and only the deep breathing of the monks broke the painful silence. Dean Fletcher still hid his feelings behind his arms as he leaned heavily on the table.

Then the Chapter discussed the form of the extreme penalty. Only one conclusion was possible, it being suggested by the very circumstances of the Dean's crime toward Abbot Thomas.

"An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," exclaimed a monk as St. John arose to announce the decision of the Chapter.

St. John's voice choked, and he could hardly speak for feeling. "Dean Richard Fletcher," he said; and at the word the Dean lifted his face. "It is the Chapter's just sentence that you shall be immured with Abbot Thomas in his bedroom." Then, after a pause, he added, "This will be Justice and Retribution combined."

The monks responded with an "Amen" that was too hearty and forceful to have been choral. It should be remembered that the Thornton Brotherhood had known nothing of the actual fate to which the Dean had committed Abbot Thomas. In the Dean's scheme, they had merely condemned the Abbot to some form of penance that should be secretly imposed upon him by the committee of three. Now that the Dean's devilish crime was laid open, the sense of elemental justice blazed up among the monks and naturally resulted in this even-handed sentence. In their judgment, only thus would the scales of Justice come to balance again.

Turning to William Winter, St. John queried, "Said you the key was in the lock?"

"Aye, the key is in its place in the door!"

"Gather, then, promptly, what masons and tools you need," he said to the mason. "As quickly as you can, take down the wall you built before the Abbot's door. When 'tis done we will have the living Dean and the dead Abbot face to face, *and we will leave them thus.*"

CHAPTER XXX. NEMESIS

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NEMESIS

IN WHICH A MAN MAKES A STRANGE LEAP INTO THE OTHER WORLD, EXPECTING THEREBY STRAIGHTWAY TO LAND IN HELL, AND, THOUGH HE WELL DESERVED HIS FATE, SOME READERS MAY BE MAGNANIMOUS ENOUGH TO HOPE THAT HE MAY HAVE EXPERIENCED SOMETHING OF A DISAPPOINTMENT

The guards conducted Dean Fletcher to the dungeon in which he had baited Guilbert de Rouen, and from which he had deliberately sent Guilbert to the noose at Lincoln. The Dean shuddered as the door closed upon him. A kindly feeling had prompted the cellarer to place refreshments in the cell, and the lock had not turned in the door before the Dean had gulped down the water. But he looked on the food and shook his head, for, though so long a fast was before him, he had no mind to eat.

Soon he seated himself on the edge of the bed, his elbows resting on his knees, his splayed hands supporting his chin, and he gazed vacantly on the floor.

"I shall lose my mind!" he exclaimed, as he raised himself and clasped his hands to his fore-

head. Then he glanced furtively about the cell, as though he feared the very walls. "I would that I could lose my mind!" he added wearily. "O that I might not know, nor feel, nor see!" A shudder shook his frame, and, reluctantly, he drifted under the sway of his own discomforting thoughts.

"They are tearing down the wall!" he thought to himself, and he put his hands before his eyes, as though he would extinguish a horrible vision. But it was no use. His hands blocked his sight, but his terrible vision they could not even cloud. His mind was preternaturally alert, and never had its discriminating powers been clearer or stronger. In spite of himself, his mind became a sort of Devil's Advocate, and it set about its task of accusation with great skill and earnestness. All his life passed in review before him, and he rendered judgment upon it, deed by deed, motive by motive, purpose by purpose.

From a calm, judicial, and condemnatory survey of his past, the Dean's thought swung around to the future, for, curiously enough, at first neither the present nor his immediate earthly future gave him much concern. The other world seemed to him more real and inevitable, and more to be feared than all his past life, or even than his impending immurement. He recoiled from death, his sins making him afraid, and his frame shook with a strange emotion. He was going out into eternity, a doomed man, and

he shrank from the awful ordeal in a manner that would have surprised his boon companions, could they have seen him now that the Fates had him cornered.

Presently, however, as was inevitable, his immediate prospects filled his mind. Unbidden, the Abbot stole into his thoughts and he could not put his strange visitor out of his mind. How fine the Abbot had appeared! How plump of figure, how happy of face; what a twinkle had lived in his eye, and how merry used to be his laugh! Every good quality of the living Abbot now haunted the Dean like a separate, sheeted ghost. And he had slain the Abbot! He did most truly repent! But retribution was too near for repentance to work out salvation for the Dean. Very soon, now, would he be face to face with the man he had wronged and murdered,—and such a meeting!

"I shall surely die of the stench!" he shouted bitterly. But the sound of his voice did not reach his guards beyond the walls, and when he again held his hands before his eyes they did not shut off the horrible vision. He saw everything all too clearly. There would be two heaps of corruption, partly hidden by two Austin habits, and in the end two human skeletons would lie across the Abbot's bedroom, their bones fallen apart and dried with the passing centuries. The Dean looked at his hands, then he pinched his arm to determine whether he were yet in the flesh. Was he not already immured in the Abbot's room, and was not

that the Abbot's dead body that lay huddled in the dark corner?

Dean Fletcher arose and, greatly agitated, he began to pace the diagonals which Guilbert de Rouen had walked the night of his arrest. The law of association and the subtle law of mental retribution, pushed the architect into the Dean's mind. "He is probably hanged by this time, and crows are already feeding on his body," he said and the thought so chilled his blood that he shivered.

The Dean's voice was sad rather than vindictive, and the old note of triumph was absent. Indeed, his defeat and the tragedy which lay across his path were forcing him to see things in their just proportions. How little of satisfaction had come to him from his successful revenge on Guilbert de Rouen! That had been a false step! The Dean's face twitched and he put his hand to his neck to slacken the noose he felt tightening there. No! A noose was not to be his Nemesis! He was to be immured! Exactly as he had immured the Abbot! And *with* the Abbot! The unburied skeletons of victim and murderer would lie side by side. O horror! What a justice! He would break away to his boon companions in the forest! But the guards outside did not even hear him pound on the door. He would never see his green archers again.

Once again the Dean sat upon his bed, and before he had recovered his breath Abbot Thomas led before his eyes a strange procession of the dead,

consisting of the victims of his own greed and lust. He had been the death of them all! The procession began with the Dean's playfellow who had drowned before his eyes in the old swimming-hole, because gay Dick Balaset was too cowardly to attempt his rescue, and the ghostly procession included a score or more who owed their death to the Green Devil's raids. Guilbert de Rouen, too, was there, and when he passed, the Dean covered his face with his hands. Then the Dean saw himself bringing up the rear of that weird procession straight on his way to Hell! The Dean arose and wildly paced the cell. Then he halted, and clutched the region of his heart to ease a pain there.

A cold clammy sweat broke out upon the man. He was seeing things very vividly now. The Abbot haunted him. The chamber to which the fates hurried him would be haunted with the dead Abbot's ghost! He would have to live with Abbot Thomas's ghost, aye, and alone die with it! He would have to live in the darkness, and also in the awful silence. When he would finally die, the Abbot's ghost would take him by the arm to the door of Hell, and push him into the fearsome place.

Temperamentally, and also by reason of life-long associations, Dean Fletcher was familiar with ghosts, and he well knew that, under certain conditions, the dead were known to plague the living.

As a lad he had feared the ghost that haunted the Bottoms, and well did he know about the

haunted house in the big wood. There, at night, had plowboy and milkmaid often seen a lighted candle cross the kitchen all by itself. They would tell that it traveled at such a height that the candlestick must have been borne in the hands of an invisible person. Sometimes the candle would tip to one side, so that there was danger that the tallow might drip on to the floor; and then, before the astounded rustics' eyes, the dip would be jerked perpendicular by some awful invisible hand. It was a matter of common report that, more than once, the candle had been seen to snuff itself, but never a glimpse had the sharpest eye of the Person or Thing that bore the invisible candlestick, or straightened the candle in its socket, or that made use of the unseen snuffers.

All this ghostly lore had been real enough, and terrible enough to the Dean, as boy and as man, and the supernatural had held him in thralldom more or less through his life. But this matter of the Abbot's ghost was something different! The Dean was going to company with goblins, to live with them at close range, and shortly he would become a goblin himself. Under the horror of the situation his lips refused to moisten, and his face was wan and ashy white. He knew that he was going straight to Hell, and that there would be no respite, and that no hand would be raised to stay his awful fate.

The Dean was wondering how long he would live in the chamber before Abbot Thomas's

ghost would drive him into the nether world, and how hot Hell would prove to be, when he was suddenly brought to himself by the creaking of the lock under the pressure of the key as some one opened the door from the outside.

Slowly the door turned on its hinges, and beyond the doorway half a dozen monks stood in the corridor. "We are here to take you to Abbot Thomas," said one of the monks. "Come!"

The Dean arose slowly, thankful for even such a respite from his own thoughts. In the corridor the monks closed about him. At the outer door St. John and the Brotherhood stood waiting, and when the Dean joined them they formed a procession about him. The great bell boomed from the tower as the "Passing Bell," and the Brothers chanted a weird dirge for the dead. In spite of his determination to bear up, Dean Fletcher was on the verge of collapse. Mere physical courage had not deserted him, but his face told the story of a fierce battle in which the man had met bitter defeat. His shoulders were stooped more than ever, and the skin on his face was more mummy-like and was drawn more tightly across the bones. His cheeks were sunken pitifully, and his lips were so parched that even the tongue of youth and of innocency would scarcely have sufficed to moisten them. As he walked, his eyes were cast upon the ground, save once when the procession carried him in sight of the Gate House, when he looked up sharply, and, seeing the heavy oaken doors closed

and barred, he knew by that token that the draw was up, and that he was hopelessly face to face with an inevitable fate. Then his eyes fell again, and St. John heard him heave a sigh the like of which he had never heard in man or beast.

As the procession moved into the corridor of the Abbot's house, the masons were removing the last courses of brick from the doorway. St. John offered the Dean a chair, which the latter was glad to accept, because he felt so weak.

The closed door, just beyond where the masons were at work, seemed to have a strange fascination for the Dean, and he riveted his eyes on the key which was still in the door exactly as his own hands had left it when he had trapped Abbot Thomas.

St. John stepped to the door to turn the key, and it turned so hard that he had to use both hands. As the bolt groaned out of mesh with the jamb of the door frame the monks fell back a little. When St. John slowly pushed the door ajar the monks were racked between fear and curiosity; but fear must have had the mastery, for the circle about the door widened, and many of the brethren nipped their noses with their thumb and finger. As the door opened further the monks nudged each other and called attention to Dean Fletcher.

The Dean had half risen to his feet, his mouth was wide open, and his eyes almost stared out of his head. When what he expected did not appear beyond the door, the Dean sank back into his

chair, and breathed a deep sigh of relief. Then he hitched forward to the very edge of his chair, and he sat with his hands on his knees and his eyes boring the dark chamber beyond the door, the while his tongue many times moistened his lips.

It was now growing dusk, and three or four torches appeared in the corridor. At a sign, one of the monks handed St. John a torch. Then St. John pushed the door wide open and stepped gingerly into the Abbot's room, whereat the Dean shivered afresh, and drew his habit close about him, as though he suffered from the cold. St. John held his torch high, and, through the open door, every eye followed his scrutiny of the room, watching his movements breathlessly, expecting every moment to hear him cry, "Here he is!" But, strange to say, St. John gave no sign, except that his brow puckered and he pursed his lips. Indeed, he found the room empty. The body of the Abbot was not there, and there appeared to be no sign that it had ever occupied the room!

The strange news spread through the corridor, and a buzz of wild excitement stirred among the monks. Dean Fletcher's eyes bulged and again his mouth fell open wide. It was incredible and utterly impossible! St. John would surely find him! Perhaps he was under the bed, mayhap curled up, half-decomposed, in yonder dark corner, —perhaps the body was covered by the bedding! Surely the Abbot was there. Or perhaps it was a

trick the Devil had played upon the Dean! The Devil himself had spirited the body away, and when the Dean was safely bricked in, away from every eye and ear but God's, the dead body of the Abbot would swing out upon the Dean from everywhere at once, terrible, hideous and vengeful! Such thought plunged the Dean further into Hell, and served to still further unbalance his tottering reason.

When St. John came out of the room, the Dean read no respite in his face. "Carry out the sentence of the Chapter," he said, simply, firmly. "He is guilty of everything else, whether he murdered Abbot Thomas or not. The rapes and murders of the Green Devil are enough to immure him a dozen times. Haul out the furniture; the dead need no furnished apartment!"

In a few minutes Abbot Thomas's furniture had been piled in the kitchen. Then the monks carried into the room a rustic table and chair. St. John took off his own crucifix and laid it on the table, and another monk laid a breviary by the side of the crucifix. Moved by some instinct of kindness, other of the brethren carried back into the room the Abbot's ewers and filled them brimful of water, and St. John, mingling kindness and justice, carried into the room a candlestick with flint and steel, and placed a small sheaf of candles on the table by the candlestick.

Dean Fletcher watched these movements with a wild, vacant stare. As St. John stepped back into

the corridor and moved in the direction of the Dean, as though the time had now come when he should escort the culprit across the fatal threshold, suddenly the Dean gave a mighty yell and sprang up from his chair.

"The Abbot! The dead Abbot! The ghost of Abbot Thomas!" shrieked the Dean. As the weird cry escaped his lips he sprang upon a block of stone and pointed his index finger down the corridor over the heads of the monks, his hand the while shaking as though with the palsy, and his face livid with uncontrolled fear. All eyes turned to where the Dean's tense finger pointed, and there down the corridor floated, as it were, the apparition of the dead Abbot Thomas! He carried his hands muffled in his sleeves before him. His eyes were wide with astonishment and inquiry, and he walked slowly toward the crowd about the bedroom door. As it approached, the apparition raised its hand, exactly as the Abbot was wont to do in the olden days when about to speak, and doubtless his familiar voice would have fallen on the monks' ears, but at that very instant Dean Fletcher's actions held the right of way.

As the apparition of the dead Abbot raised its hand to speak, Dean Fletcher lost control of himself. With another wild shriek he sprang from the stone on which he stood and, plumping one foot knee deep into the mortar tub, he bounded to the top of the pile of brick and stone that lay in the corridor. From the topmost block of stone the

insane man gave one wild look around upon the monks. Then, glancing at the advancing ghost of the dead Abbot, he threw himself down through the doorway into the Abbot's room, where he fell flat upon his face and lay sprawled full length across the floor, without sound or motion, even as though he were already dead. Noticing the edge of a parchment sticking out from one of the Dean's pockets, St. John stepped across the threshold and, stooping down, he took possession of the parchment. A faint smile flickered for a moment across the set face of St. John as he thrust the parchment into his own bosom, for he had noted that the parchment was none other than the stolen Manor House deed.

"I will present it to Mistress Heloise!" he said to himself, as he closed the door upon the Dean. Then he turned the key in the lock and motioned the masons to proceed.

"The Abbey's strict justice upon Dean Fletcher we will keep secret," St. John said to the monks, as he waved them dismissal with his hand. "'Tis better and quicker than the civil arm would act, and less expensive!" he added, as the brethren turned to go, nodding their heads in assent.

The strange diversion of the Dean's shriek and of his leap into his own tomb, had turned every eye from the Abbot, and when St. John had closed the door the apparition had vanished. St. John left the masons in charge of the Treasurer, and himself hurried down the corridor. At the Gate House he

intercepted Abbot Thomas in the flesh, and the two men embraced, for they dearly loved each other.

For a full minute neither man spoke.

"How gained you the Abbey?" St. John asked at length.

"The draw was down and I had a key to the postern."

"'Tis strange. The watch had strict orders to keep the bridge up. Yea! 'Tis down now! I suppose that the keepers are out to see justice done!" St. John's tone of voice changed, as he continued, saying: "You will come back to us, and be our Abbot again?"

"Nay! Nay! St. John! 'Tis kindly meant, but it may not be! I'm in a wider world, and am also playing a more useful part," answered the Abbot.

"How did you escape immurement? It was a most puzzling situation just now, to find the room empty! A good thing for you and for me, but the Dean actually thought that you were your ghost!"

"Guilbert de Rouen rescued me the day the villeins stormed the Abbey. He discovered a secret passage and carried me out, and the Lady Heloise nursed me back to life. I would have you keep secret my immurement, and also the most just end of Dean Fletcher. We must save the Abbey from scandal. And, St. John, I would that you might be Abbot in my place. With Dean

Fletcher gone, Thornton under you would be a happy Brotherhood."

Silence fell between the two, as each man thought about his friend, Guilbert de Rouen. "Guilbert is a noble man," said St. John, and tears were not far beneath the surface of his voice. "He is a good man. Will he hang, think you?"

The Abbot was greatly moved, and when he spoke it was in tones the most grave.

"I fear he will hang," he said. "In spite of all his friends can do for him, his case is most hopeless. All levers in his behalf seem to fail us. I'm back shortly to try again, and John Wyclif keeps close watch. A dozen strong men have risked their necks to the king, so far to no purpose, and it is all we can do to keep some from drawing the sword. But we shall keep on trying, until—it is—until it is too late." The near prospect of that day so affected the Abbot that he could hardly speak. "Wyclif sped me to York on a mission," he continued. "In passing, I yielded to an impulse to turn aside to see the Abbey once again. I found you at your strange task, and would have interposed, but that I had solemnly bound myself that I would never interfere between that man and the Almighty's vengeance. Therefore I turned about and left him to his fate, and though to do that went sorely against the feelings of my heart, the action has the approval of my head."

"The Dean was—the Dean is—I suppose he is, though when I touched him he seemed to be dead

already—the Dean was a very wicked man," answered St. John. "He was the closest incarnation of the Devil I have ever known! May God Almighty have mercy on his soul!"

The Abbot bowed his head and responded with a grave "Amen!" In a moment the Abbot continued, "I trust that he is dead. I cannot bear to think of even such a wretch as he suffering what he caused me to suffer. Probably he is dead. He must be dead!"

"I think the Dean is dead," said St. John. "What I have seen him go through today would end a man of iron!"

The two men crossed the deserted bridge, and just beyond the Abbot turned and placed his hands on St. John's shoulders. "Be thou Abbot in my stead," he said.

Then the two men kissed each other, and the Abbot took the road to the forest. After a few paces the Abbot turned and lifted his hands in blessing, and St. John, standing by the end of the bridge, received his *Pax Vobiscum* with bowed head. Then he recrossed the bridge into the Abbey.

CHAPTER XXXI.
AN IDYL WITH A CLOUD

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AN IDYL WITH A CLOUD

WHICH FAITHFULLY CHRONICLES THE MANNER IN WHICH, AFTER MUCH STORM AND STRESS, CERTAIN SHIPS CAST ANCHOR IN QUIET WATERS, THE CHAPTER BEING DEDICATED TO THE COMFORTABLE FAITH THAT, "ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL"

Once more it was summertime in the land. In the Abbey St. John ruled in the stead of Abbot Thomas, and by consummate gentleness he had reduced the Brotherhood to order after the stress of the past year, so that once more there reigned at Thornton the good will which should mark the religious life. With the new harmony all nature was in tune. The forest was green, the fields laughed toward abundant harvest, and the wayside bloomed with wild flowers. Overhead, the blue sky was flecked with fleecy clouds, and the sun was warm, while a charm lay upon the long genial days and the short cool nights which made of the land a veritable paradise.

The garden at the Manor House had come to its wonted summer bloom. All day long, birds and butterflies flitted among its trees and flowers. The noisy bees sang their song of honey through the day, and when the light of the moon mimicked

day through the short summer night, a nightingale trilled from the thorn tree in the hedge at the bottom of the garden.

Summertime had also come for the two who loitered in the garden during these long days. As they trod the walks together and picked flowers, the ripple of a woman's laughter would smite the thrush with envy. It was marvelous how much music inhered in a mere name, when the woman would call, "Guilbert!" And you never knew the charm of the name borne by the maid of the Manor House until in the garden you had heard it reverently and joyously on the tongue of Guilbert de Rouen.

"Two birds a-cooing!" the gardener would remark to Martin Reeve, as the two pottered among the flowers.

Old Martin would smile in his quiet grim way. " 'Tis better than hanging, I'm a-thinking!" he said. Then he would add with evident satisfaction: "He's more natural than a monk. I like it better, and she is happier these days than she was before."

Guilbert de Rouen was back at the Manor House, and Heloise was very happy. Guilbert's escape from the gallows had been by a margin so narrow that he would often playfully declare that his neck felt sore, and that underneath his stock might be seen the welt of a rope!

Guilbert owed his life to the persistent importunity of his friends with the king. Straightway

from the trial Sir William had gone to Westminster. King Richard was in a bad temper and promptly ordered Sir William to leave court.

The doughty knight sought out strong allies, and deliberately laid siege. John Wyclif espoused his cause, and went with him in person to the king, and the two pleaded for Guilbert's life, but to no immediate purpose. Without leaders the villeins would never have revolted, and the leaders should suffer the full penalty of their treason—such was the king's damning logic. That Sir William had served the Black Prince in his French campaigns, and was one of that great warrior's most trusted friends, counted for little with the Black Prince's son when that scion was angry or was set on blood. But Wyclif knew the temper of the king, and had well charted the influences to which the vain boy was most susceptible. By way of kitchen politics he at length gained Richard's signature to a reprieve which further postponed Guilbert's hanging until the first of March. Whereupon the friends of Guilbert took courage, and continued to maintain a constant watch upon the king's changing moods.

In January the king married Anne of Bohemia, and London was ablaze with festivities. The bride had a fair face, and also a gentle heart that leaned kindly toward the poor. She signalized her nuptials by securing from the royal groom a general amnesty for the prisoners of the rising. Fearing that Guilbert de Rouen might possibly

be overlooked in the general application of the amnesty, before the ink on the parchment was sanded dry, John Wyclif and his friends seized the gracious moment to sue the king for his full pardon and for the restoration of all his civil rights.

"Your friend's got good friends, I swear," cried the king. "Give me another parchment, and I'll clerk him a full pardon! I'm sick of blood! Love on the throne! Let Guilbert de Rouen go scot free!" The king scrawled the writing on the parchment, and with his own hands he held it on the table while the great seal was being affixed, whereupon he was rewarded by a gracious smile from the bride-queen.

On a lazy evening when the spell of English twilight lay upon the Manor House garden, Guilbert and Heloise sat on the bench by the fountain. There came a footfall on the gravel walk, and the pair moved a little apart, as, with something of a twinkle in his eyes, Martin Reeve appeared upon the scene.

"I'm fresh from Lincoln," Martin announced when Heloise had bidden him speak. "Day before yesterday, after the baiting, a Wyclif preacher stood forth in the bull ring to speak to the crowd. When the monk threw back his hood, by St. Satan, who should it prove to be but our Abbot Thomas! In his russet frock I hardly knew him, and he looks better in Austin black, but his voice was the same I used to hear talking to the birds here in the garden. It was good to hear him talk again. And

he did talk. No mumbling, I tell you! He looked so good himself, and spoke so kindly of better days a-coming, and of how men ought to live together in peace and love, that I shamed of my bow, and hid it behind my back where he couldn't see it; and now I'm ready to swear that rye bread isn't black, nor small beer either weak or sour! He made me wish we were all better men, he did! Well, to come to the point, as the spear said when it slew the man, the Abbot,—I reckon he is an Abbot yet, isn't he?"

The twain on the bench shook their heads, smiling together at the man's ambling tongue, the while they enjoyed his unconscious humor, as though the problem of Father Thomas's status in the ecclesiastical world was clear beyond, above, or below them.

Receiving no enlightenment on the problem that puzzled him, old Martin proceeded, "Well, as I was a-saying, the Abbot talked the discontented people happy, and the hungry people full. When the sermon was ended he spied me out, and motioned me to him. He seemed glad to see me, I suppose because I was one to carry him out and helped you, my mistress, nurse him back to life; though what there was in me to weep about is clear beyond my depth; unless it was that my jerkin was full of holes, or my leggins ragged, or my cap featherless, and I myself had seen better days! But, it's bad manners laughing at ill luck!

"The Abbot was wonderful curious to know

about you all at the Manor House, and seemed sort of glad, Sir, that you, Sir, were here,—as he well ought to be; for if ever man saved another's life, you, Sir, saved the Abbot's, and God bless you. He told me to tell you all, that for awhile Lincoln would be his headquarters, and that there he would stay with some Benedictine friends in their Abbey. And if any of you came to Lincoln he would expect to you see there!"

Old Martin returned down the path, and when Guilbert heard him close the garden gate he turned to Heloise, earnestly, as though to resume an interrupted conversation.

"What about the priest?" he asked. "St. John is away at Lincoln, and thence to London to be gone a whole month," he added lugubriously, whereat Heloise laughed. Unperturbed, Guilbert continued, "We might get Father Ambrose, the Thornton parish priest, but I fear me that he would fall asleep between responses!"

"Perhaps Martin solves our problem about the priest," said Heloise, sobering as she spoke.

"How so? 'Tis thirty miles or more to Lincoln, and the Abbot will hardly come this way."

"How slow of understanding a man can be!" exclaimed Heloise, her laughter rippling over the fountain.

"Mean you that we might be wed in Lincoln?" Guilbert asked, surprise in his voice. "What about the wedding festivities,—flowers, and bells, carols by day, and serenades by night, and Thorn-

ton topsy-turvy to do honor to your wedding day? You may not forego these tributes of your neighbors' love."

Heloise was well pleased with his thoughtfulness, but she said, "Never mind the festivities. To cut the gordian knot, we'll ride to Lincoln, and Abbot Thomas shall seal our marriage vows, an' he will do it."

The hesitancy that lurked in her last words did not escape Guilbert's notice. Heloise was not quite certain that she ought to ask the Abbot to perform her wedding ceremony. For her the situation would not be hard, but might it not be full of grave difficulties for him? Her earlier attachment to the Abbot had developed into an orderly, high, and keen appreciation of him as a priest, which would make his performance of her wedding ceremony of supreme value. For her the unusual relationship had cleared itself, and the experience had established in her mind the fundamental distinctions which exist between the relationship of spiritual adviser and that of husband. As the former she still held the Abbot in the highest regard, while she was free to give herself to Guilbert de Rouen in the holy relationship of husband and wife. Moreover, Heloise knew that the Abbot wished it to be so. But ought she to ask the man she had regarded in such an unusual manner to perform the ceremony that would make her the wife of another? Abbot Thomas had made his great renunciation in the interests of his religious vows, but might not some

of the old feeling linger in him yet? Heloise referred the matter to Guilbert for his opinion.

"You need have no fear on that score," Guilbert replied. "A month ago I met the Abbot at Salisbury. He is a great man, and a good man, too. You are not weaned from his marriageable love more than he is from yours. He is wedded to John Wyclif's cause, and bridegroom never was happier in the possession of his bride. He loves the world better than he could ever love a woman. Never saw I a man more consumed with the passion of his work. The night before I saw him, he had slept by a haystack in the fields, having preached five times that day and traveled fifteen miles. That day at Salisbury he preached in the market place four times, and at night he passed on into the villages. Abbot Thomas will be glad to join our hands. He as good as told me so,—we may depend on that."

On a bright day in August the cathedral at Lincoln had a surprise. At tierce the finest coach the city could afford, loaned for the occasion from the equipage of Mistress Catherine Swynford below the Hill, lumbered through the close and drew up before the north transept entrance to the cathedral. For escort Sir William Wellham and a gay young Lincolnshire squire rode on either side the coach, the former with a rich surcoat showing brilliant over his shining mail, the latter in the finest trappings the office of Squire to a Knight allowed. Behind the coach, on a mettlesome steed, rode Guilbert

de Rouen, his face more notable than his gay silks, his plumed hat, his grotesquely pointed shoes, or his red yellow-lined cloak. Martin Reeve brought up the rear with a score of retainers, nosegays tied on their halberds with knots of ribbon, the very gait of the men a wedding march. At the big doors the horsemen dismounted, and the young squire threw open the door of the coach, and, with due ceremony, assisted the Lady Wellham and Mistress Heloise to alight—the women resplendent with wedding attire.

At the door of the Chapel of St. Hugh one of Wyclif's Poor Priests stood waiting. When the russet priest threw back his hood, the action revealed the genial face of Abbot Thomas. Save for the plain russet gown, and that his features bore marks of an outdoor life, it was the Abbot of former days that led the way into the Chapel of St. Hugh. A closer scrutiny of the face might have revealed certain lines of care, and even of suppressed pain. Had Heloise seen these tokens on the Abbot's face, she might have concluded that it might have been better had she not invited him to perform her wedding ceremony, for it was just possible that the matter weighed more heavily on his heart than was indicated by his genial and gentle manner.

But nothing of strain showed in the Abbot's face or voice. Guilbert and Heloise stood before the altar, and in the finely modulated voice of a scholar the Abbot read the ritual, intoning deep meaning into every accent. The happy pair made the

customary responses, and the Abbot solemnly pronounced the words that made them husband and wife, "For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, until death—shall—you—part!" and he spoke the words with signal solemnity.

"You will come with us to the Tabard?" Guilbert turned to say to the Abbot as the party moved out from the Chapel. But the Abbot had retired to the sacristy.

"We'll send the coach back for him," Heloise said, and the party moved down the aisle.

A score of young girls waited at the great door, and scattered flowers on the bride and groom as they emerged into the open, spreading the bloom adown the path from the door to the coach.

"It was good of you to think of it!" Heloise said to Guilbert as her face suffused with pleasure, and through her tears Lady Wellham smiled upon the happy pair.

The wedding party had entered the parlor of the Tabard Inn, and Guilbert lingered a moment or two on the porch to instruct the coachmen to return for Abbot Thomas, when a monk came running down the street and, breathless, halted by the coach. "The russet priest that married you is dead!" the monk said to Guilbert. "After the ceremony he fell suddenly sick in the sacristy, and we could neither drug nor bleed him back to life. The brothers sent me, because they thought that you would like to know, and maybe you can tell us who are his friends."

Guilbert was greatly shocked, but he decided that he would not immediately break the news to Heloise. There might be some mistake about the matter. He would investigate, and then tell Heloise as gently as he could.

"You need not go up the hill; you may return directly home," Guilbert said to the waiting coachman. "Tell the wedding party in the parlor that Guilbert de Rouen will return shortly, having gone up the hill," he instructed a lackey. Then he returned with the monk to the cathedral.

The dead Abbot had already been borne out of the sacristy, and in an apartment adjoining the Chapter House four monks were preparing the body for burial.

"He's a stranger," one of the monks remarked as Guilbert entered. "One of Wyclif's men, but his underclothing seems to indicate that otherwise he was a man of some distinction. Know you his name or station?"

"He is a friend of mine, a good man, and a russet priest who submerged his name in his work," Guilbert answered, desiring to shield the Abbot's tragedy from unsympathetic ears.

Guilbert raised the cloth to look upon the Abbot's face, and there were tears in his voice as well as in his eyes as he asked, "Spoke he no word? Did he leave no message?"

"He said little or nothing that we could make sense of," replied one of the monks. "While I was chafing his hand, I heard him say, 'Heloise,

Heloise, O Heloise,' pronouncing the name thrice, and with much feeling. She must be the Prioress of some Abbey, but we know not of such a one here. Once I seemed to hear him say, 'Guilbert,' as though he were thinking of some Brother—perhaps a cell mate in his Abbey. Then his head fell back, and I thought that he was dead. Presently he revived. He seemed to get quite strong again, so that I thought he would recover. But he sank away again, and incoherent words were faint upon his lips. I caught the words, 'God'—'so loved'—'world'—'he gave.' He seemed, Sir, to put emphasis on the last word. He spoke no more, Sir, for he was dead. The words sound somewhat familiar to us. Brother Benedict and I think that they may be snatches from Dan Chaucer, but Brother Henry, here, affirms that he fancies that the words are from the Bible. Know you whether either guess is right?"

Guilbert was weeping, and he did not answer the garrulous monk. The face of the dead was calm and restful, and a smile had set upon the still countenance. Guilbert almost fancied that the lips moved to speak to him, but when he placed his hand gently on the Abbot's forehead the chill of death had already settled there. Guilbert was very sorrowful, for memory of the full tide of the Abbot's tragedy surged in upon him, and so closely was his own good fortune associated with the Abbot's suffering, that he felt as though the Abbot's tragedy were his very own. Moreover, he bore the sorrow for him-

self, and also for Heloise, for he knew that she would feel the Abbot's death most keenly.

Encouraged by Guilbert's evident sympathy, the monk continued, "We found this on his person, fastened over his heart. It is a scripment of some sort, and an amulet, as one well can see," he added, as he gave Guilbert a small dainty sheepskin package.

With trembling fingers Guilbert opened the package. It contained a small scrap of parchment, and on it a brief essay on "Hypatia," done in Heloise's dainty hand, and subscribed with her signature. Guilbert put the little scroll in his pocket, and, because in their eyes he stood so evidently for the dead man's next of kin, the monks did not say him nay.

At length Guilbert overcame his grief enough to say, "The dead monk was my dear friend. I will bear the expense of his burial, and of masses for the repose of his soul."

He put a gold piece into the hand of one of the monks, and walked soberly away. As he passed down the great nave, a solemn chant floated from the chancel, and certain words from an ancient book came forcibly to his mind.

"There are three things which are too wonderful for me,
Yea four which I know not;
The way of a serpent upon a rock;
The way of a ship in the midst of the sea;
And the way of a man with a maid."

Never had Heloise felt such grief as came when Guilbert broke to her the news and the manner of the Abbot's death. She felt as though she were

guilty of his untimely end, and most bitterly she blamed herself for having selfishly invited the Abbot to perform her marriage ceremony. Her husband sought to comfort her.

"The Abbot would have eaten out his brave heart whether he had married us or not," Guilbert said. "Performing the ceremony would have made no difference in the case," he continued, as he tried to ease her sobbing.

There was little comfort in Guilbert's words. When he put his strong arm about her, Heloise dropped her head upon his shoulder, but she was so distraught that she found but slight comfort even there.

A week later, Guilbert and Heloise, greatly saddened, but also chastened into a deeper and richer love by the tragedy of the death of Abbot Thomas, rode southward for Dover, on the way to France. Yearning for the scenes of his old campaigns, honest Martin Reeve accompanied them, at the head of half a dozen of the Wellham retainers who were also hungry for further French adventures, and who could guard Mistress Heloise on the road and serve her in Guilbert's chateau in France.

As the party rode into Dover town, the sun was setting. A glorious light flooded the Downs, and glinted the town and castle with crimson glory, while it spread silver and gold over the placid water of the channel. As the party dismounted before the Queen's Inn, Guilbert and Heloise stood a moment

on the stone steps to drink in the warmth of the soft sweet light.

"What a glorious sunset!" exclaimed Heloise, greatly moved by the glory.

"It is our sunrise!" answered Guilbert, significantly, and a smile of great gladness suffused his face with a finer than sunset light.

CHAPTER XXXII. THE EPILOGUE

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WHICH CONTAINS SOME INCONSEQUENTIAL PARAGRAPHS WHICH DO NOT PROPERLY BELONG TO THE STORY, AND WHICH THEREFORE MAY BE SKIPPED AT THE READER'S PLEASURE

The Thornton monks bore the Keebly witch to a neighboring convent, where the sisters nursed the erratic creature back to life. With the administration of their simples, the sisters instilled in their patient's mind such religious teaching as was possible, but it is safe to say that they never had a more unpromising pupil, or one whose progress in things religious caused them to look with less hope toward harvest time.

"She is a pagan!" the Abbess would say. "A pagan she will remain in spite of all that we can do!"

In a little while there came a missive from France inviting Becky to make Heloise a visit, which invitation she promptly accepted. Heloise gave the witch a most hearty, sisterly welcome, but she was greatly surprised at the words with which Becky returned her greeting.

"I'm a new woman!" Becky exclaimed. "I've turned over a new leaf. No more necromancy for

me; except that I would learn what it is that makes you a good woman, and then try to do it!"

The strangest thing about this unexpected resolution doubtless was that much of it came true, and like twin sisters Heloise and Becky lived together until the end of Becky's life.

Dean Fletcher was never seen again. The Thornton Brotherhood, trained to strict obedience, remained as silent about the Dean's fate as did the stone walls of his tomb.

When four and a half centuries had rolled over the land, and when upon the throne of the Plantagenet sat a German George, among the picturesque ruins of Thornton Abbey a company of workmen were tearing down certain walls which time had rendered unsafe.

"Here is a door that was built up sometime," said the foreman. "Pick it out, Tom, and let's see what's behind!"

When the debris had been cleared away, the workmen discovered a secret chamber. In the chamber stood a table and a chair, and both the articles of furniture were very ancient and were loaded with dust. On the table stood an old candlestick, and close by an uncut sheaf of candles, which could hardly be distinguished under thick layers of dust. A crucifix and a breviary lay upon the table, and these likewise were covered with dust. In the chamber the men also found two ancient ewers,

dust-choked. The workman who sprang into the room to investigate further was horrified to come upon the skeleton of a man, face downward, lying full length upon the floor, and over him lay shreds of what had doubtless once been a monk's habit. When the man touched the form, it crumbled into dust.

At once antiquarians fell to work upon the problem presented by this strange discovery, and in due time their investigations were rewarded. In the old Chronicle of the Abbey, preserved among the manuscript of the Bodleian library, was found this very significant entry concerning Abbot Thomas de Gretham.

"He died, but in what manner I know not. He hath no obit as the other Abbots have, and the place of his burial hath not been found."

Perhaps this entry in the old Thornton Chronicle refers to Abbot Thomas's strange and unaccountable disappearance from the Abbot's chair; and it may well be that the nineteenth century workmen stumbled upon the long-sealed tomb of Richard Fletcher, the infamous Green Devil who haunts the traditions of Thornton Abbey.

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